

Stendhal

The Red and  
the Black

A CHRONICLE OF 1830

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FOR REUVEN ELIEZER PRIDE

## **PUBLISHER'S NOTE**

This work was about to make its first appearance when the great events of July intervened, leading French minds in a direction ill suited to works of the imagination. We have reason to believe that the pages that follow were written in 1827.<sup>1</sup>

# BOOK ONE

The truth, the bitter truth.

DANTON

1

## A SMALL TOWN

*Put thousands together,*

*Less bad,*

*But the cage less gay.*

HOBBS<sup>1</sup>

Some might consider the little town of Verrières one of the prettiest in all of the Franche-Comté. Its white houses with their red roofs are dotted all across the slope of a hill, and clumps of big, sturdy chestnut trees mark out indentations on the hillside. The river Doubs flows a few hundred feet below the town's old fortifications, erected long ago by the Spanish and nowadays fallen into ruins.

A high mountain, a spur of the Jura, shelters Verrières from the north. The Verra's jagged summits are covered with snow from the first cold days of October. A torrent descends from the mountain and passes through Verrières on its way to empty into the Doubs, providing power for a great many sawmills; it's a simple enough kind of industry, and it has provided a comfortable life for the majority of the residents, who are more peasants than townspeople. But it isn't the sawmills that have made this little town rich. Instead, the factory that produces printed fabrics, the kind called Mulhouse,<sup>2</sup> is responsible for the general well-being here and, ever since the fall of Napoleon, it has been the source of the fine, refurbished frontings adorning practically every house in Verrières.

But you've scarcely set foot in the town when you're half deafened by the

clattering din of a noisy, frightening-looking machine. Twenty heavy hammers pound and pound again, so loud they make the cobblestones shake; they're pulled back up again by a wheel that's powered by the water from the torrent. Each one of those hammers fashions I don't know how many thousands of nails. It's up to a set of pretty, fresh-faced young girls to hold out their bits of iron for the huge hammers, which rapidly pound and shape the bits into nails. This harsh-looking labor is one of the most surprising things encountered by the traveler who arrives for the first time in the mountains that separate France from Switzerland.<sup>3</sup> If the traveler coming into Verrières were to ask who owns this splendid nail factory that deafens anyone walking up the main street, the reply would come in the local drawl: "Err! Belongs to the mayor."

Now, if the traveler stands still for a few minutes on the main street of Verrières, which ascends from the river Doubs all the way to the top of the hill, it's a hundred to one that he will see a tall, busy-looking man with an air of great importance make an appearance.

When he does appear, all the hats are quickly doffed. His hair is graying and he's dressed in gray. He's a Knight of several orders, he has a tall forehead and an aquiline nose, and taken all in all, his face is not without a certain regularity: one's first impression is that it combines the dignity of a small-town mayor with the kind of agreeable charm that suits someone of forty-eight or fifty. Ultimately, though, you might deduce that this is a man whose talent consists in nothing more than getting paid exactly what he's owed, and in putting off making any payments of his own till the very last moment.

Such is the mayor of Verrières, Monsieur de Rênal. After crossing the street with a solemn step, he walks into the town hall, at which point he disappears from the traveler's view. But if the latter continues his stroll a hundred yards up the street, he will come upon a rather beautiful house, and he will see, through the iron grill fence surrounding the place, some superb gardens. Beyond this, the hills of Bourgogne form the line of the horizon, the sight seeming to have been created just to delight the eye. This view helps the traveler forget the pestilent atmosphere of small-minded moneymaking that was beginning to stifle him.

He learns that this house is Monsieur de Rênal's. The mayor of Verrières owes this beautiful stone residence, still in the process of being completed, to the profits his nail factory generates. People say his family is an old Spanish one, with claims to have been firmly established in the region before Louis XIV conquered it.<sup>4</sup>

Since 1815, he blushes at being associated with industry: 1815 made him mayor of Verrières.<sup>5</sup> The retaining walls supporting the various terraces in those superb gardens of his that run, stage by stage, down the hillside to the river Doubs, are also a reward given to Monsieur de Rênal for his expertise in the iron industry.

Do not expect to find in France the kind of picturesque gardens you see surrounding the manufacturing towns of Germany—Leipzig, Frankfurt, Nuremberg, etc. In the Franche-Comté, the more walls a man builds, the more stones he heaps up, one atop the other, the more he earns the right to be respected by others. The gardens of Monsieur de Rênal, bristling with walls, are all the more admired because he purchased, for a great deal of gold, the little scraps of land on which they are situated. Now, for example, recall the sawmill you noticed because of its odd position on the Doubs bank when you first entered Verrières, the one upon which you read the name SOREL painted in giant letters on a board on top of the roof: well, six years ago, that sawmill occupied the very spot on which at the moment the fourth terrace of Monsieur de Rênal's gardens is being constructed.

Despite his pride, the mayor had to pay court repeatedly to old Sorel, a rough and stubborn peasant, and it ended up costing him a great many gold louis<sup>6</sup> to talk him into relocating his sawmill somewhere else. As for the *public* stream that had powered the sawmill, Monsieur de Rênal, thanks to the influence he has in Paris, got permission to have it diverted. He was granted this favor following the elections of 182\*.<sup>7</sup>

He gave Sorel four acres in exchange for his one, five hundred yards below, on the bank of the Doubs. And even though this new site was much better suited to his trade in pinewood planks, old Monsieur Sorel—as people have begun calling him, now that he's rich—still managed to gouge another six thou-

sand francs out of his neighbor, motivated as Rênal was by his impatience and the general *mania for land*.

True, this arrangement did not come about without some criticism from the locals who had what are called good heads on their shoulders. One Sunday, about four years after the transaction, as Monsieur de Rênal was walking home from church dressed in his mayoral finery, he caught sight of old Sorel at a distance, surrounded by his three sons, watching him with a smile. That smile burst upon the mayor like a fatal ray of illumination, for ever since, he cannot help wondering whether he might have been able to make a better deal.

To achieve popular esteem in Verrières, it's essential never to adopt—while, of course, continuing to build as many walls as possible—any construction plan imported from Italy by the stonemasons who, in the spring, pass through the gorges of the Jura on their way to Paris. Any such innovation would earn the imprudent owner the eternal reputation of *wrongheadedness*, and he would forever be considered lost in the eyes of the wise, moderate people who distribute esteem and respect in the Franche-Comté.

And in fact those wise people rule with the most irritating kind of *despotism*, a vile word that sums up what is most intolerable about life in a small town—at least for anyone who has lived for a time in that great republic known as Paris. The tyranny of public opinion—and what an opinion!—is as *stupid* in the small towns of France as it is in the United States of America.

## 2

# A MAYOR

*Social importance: Monsieur, what does it bring you?*  
*Respect from fools, awe from children, contempt from the wise.*

BARNAVE<sup>8</sup>

Fortunately for Monsieur de Rênal's reputation as an administrator, an enormous *retaining wall* had become necessary for the public avenue that runs across the hillside a hundred feet up from the Doubs. The spot provides one of the most picturesque views in France. But every springtime, the rains dig deep channels across the avenue, making it unusable. This inconvenience, felt by everybody, put Monsieur de Rênal in the enviable position of immortalizing his administration by building a wall twenty feet high and some seventy or eighty yards long.

Monsieur de Rênal needed three trips to Paris to get approval for the wall's parapet, because the second-to-last minister of the interior had declared mortal enmity to the promenade in Verrières; the parapet now rises up four feet above ground level. And, as if declaring defiance of all ministers past and present, it is currently being finished with solid stone slabs.

How many times have I stood there, dreaming about the parties in Paris that I had left behind the day before, my chest leaning up against those great blocks of stone, those fine, bluish-gray stones, while my gaze swept deep down into the Doubs valley! Over there, on the left bank, I could see five or six winding valleys, and I could even make out the little streams that ran through each. They cascade their way downward, and you can see them reach their end in the Doubs. Here in these mountains, the sun is hot, and when it is directly overhead, the traveler can rest on this terrace, sheltered by magnificent plane trees. Their rapid growth and their fine, bluish foliage are due to the mayor's having put in new soil behind the enormous retaining wall, for, despite the opposition of the municipal council, he has widened the avenue by six feet (and though he is an Ultra and I'm a Liberal, I must admit I applaud him for it). This is why, both in his opinion and in that of Monsieur Valenod, who holds the fortunate position of governor of the local poorhouse, the terrace is worthy of comparison with that of Saint-Germain-en-Laye.<sup>9</sup>

I have only one criticism of this Cours de la Fidélité—which is the street's official title, inscribed fifteen or twenty different times on marble plaques that have resulted in one cross the more for Monsieur de Rênal.<sup>10</sup> My complaint about the Cours de la Fidélité has to do with the barbaric manner in which the

authorities have clipped and pollarded those vigorous trees. Instead of making them look like a set of vulgar kitchen vegetables, these trees should be allowed to flourish in the magnificent form they assume in England. But the mayor's will is despotic, and twice a year every tree in the commune undergoes a pitiless amputation. The local Liberals claim, though they exaggerate, that the official gardener has developed a far more severe hand now that Monsieur Maslon, the vicar, has taken to appropriating all the cuttings for himself.

This young ecclesiastic was sent from Besançon some years back to keep a watchful eye on the Abbé Chélan and a few of the neighborhood curés. An old army surgeon from the Army of Italy<sup>11</sup> had retired in Verrières; he had been, according to the mayor, both a Jacobin and a Bonapartist in his time. One day, the man dared complain about the periodic mutilation of those fine trees.

"I like shade," replied Monsieur de Rênal, with that special note of hauteur one assumes when addressing a surgeon and member of the Legion of Honor. "I like shade, and I have *my* trees trimmed to give shade, and in fact I conceive of no other purpose a tree can possibly have, especially when, unlike, say, the useful walnut, it doesn't *bring in any revenue*."

And there it is, the great phrase itself, the one that decides everything in Verrières: *BRING IN REVENUE*. More than three-fourths of the inhabitants here think of nothing else.

*Bringing in revenue* is the reason that decides everything in this little town that you found so pretty. The stranger who finds himself here, seduced by the beauty of the cool, deep valleys that surround the place, at first imagines the inhabitants must be sensitive to *beauty*; and indeed they speak of little else than the beauty of their region. No one can deny that they make a great fuss about it; but they do so strictly in order to draw in strangers, whose money will enrich the innkeepers, and that, through the local taxes paid, *brings in revenue for the town*.

It was a splendid autumn day when Monsieur de Rênal was strolling down the Cours de la Fidélité with his wife, her arm through his. Though she was listening to her husband as he spoke in solemn tones, her eye could not help



but stray to observe, with some disquiet, the movements of three boys. The oldest, who might be as much as eleven, was repeatedly getting too close to the parapet, and looked as though he were about to climb on it. A gentle voice called out the name of Adolphe, and the boy abandoned his ambitious project. Madame de Rênal appeared to be a woman of thirty, though she was still pretty.

“He might very well regret it, that fine gentleman from Paris,” Monsieur de Rênal was saying indignantly, his face paler than usual. “It’s not as if I didn’t have a few friends at the Château . . .”<sup>12</sup>

But even though I intend to speak to you about provincial life for a couple of hundred pages, I am not barbaric enough to make you endure the tedium and the *clever turns* of a provincial dialogue.

That fine gentleman from Paris who so annoyed the mayor of Verrières was none other than Monsieur Appert.<sup>13</sup> Two days previous, he had managed to get himself inside not only the prison and poorhouse<sup>14</sup> but also inside the hospital, which was administered as a charity by the mayor and the principal landowners of the area.

“But,” Madame de Rênal asked timidly, “what harm can that gentleman from Paris do you? After all, you see to the welfare of the poor with the most scrupulous honesty.”

“He’s only here to *find fault*, and then he’ll go off and get articles published in all the Liberal papers.”

“But you never read them, dearest.”

“Oh, other people do and then tell us about these Jacobin articles, and all that just distracts us and *gets in the way of our doing good*.<sup>15</sup> Personally, I’ll never forgive that curé.”

# THE WELFARE OF THE POOR

*A virtuous and disinterested curé is Providential for a village.*

FLEURY<sup>16</sup>

The reader needs to know that the curé of Verrières, an old man of eighty who nonetheless seemed to possess an iron strength and character, the result perhaps of breathing in the bracing mountain air, had the right to visit the prison, the hospital, and even the poorhouse anytime he wished. Monsieur Appert was shrewd enough to arrive precisely at 6:00 a.m. in that nosy little town, having with him an introduction from Paris to the priest. He went directly to the presbytery.

Father Chélan read the letter, addressed to him from the Marquis de La Mole, a peer of France and the wealthiest landowner in the province, and he paused, reflecting.

I'm old and well liked here, he murmured to himself; they wouldn't dare! Then turning swiftly to face the gentleman from Paris, his eyes burning despite his great age, with that sacred fire that presages some fine act, and one that is also a little dangerous, he said:

"Come with me, Monsieur, and when we're in the presence of the jailer and, especially, of the overseers in the poorhouse, please refrain from uttering any comment on the things we're about to see." Monsieur Appert realized he was dealing with a man of spirit; he followed the venerable priest and visited the prison, the hospital, and the poorhouse, and though he asked many questions, he uttered nothing that could be taken as casting blame.

These visits took several hours. The priest invited Monsieur Appert to dine with him, but he declined, saying he had letters to write; he didn't want to com-

promise his generous companion any further. Around three o'clock, the two gentlemen returned to finish their inspection of the poorhouse, and from there they went to the prison. There, they found the jailer standing in the doorway, a kind of giant, six feet tall with bandy legs; his already ignoble face was now hideous with terror.

"Ah, Monsieur!" he said, seeing it was the priest approaching. "This gentleman I see with you—isn't he Monsieur Appert?"

"And if he were?" said the priest.

"Well, it's just that I was given the most definite order that the prefect sent down yesterday; he had it sent to me by a gendarme, who had to gallop all night to get here, to tell me I'm not to admit Monsieur Appert into the prison."

"I freely admit, Monsieur Noiroud," said the priest, "that this traveler you see with me is in fact Monsieur Appert. Now, you do recognize my right to enter the prison at any hour of the day or night, accompanied by anyone I wish?"

"Yes, Father," the jailer said quietly, his head hanging down so that he resembled a bulldog who obeys because he fears the stick.<sup>17</sup> "It's just, you see, I have a wife and children, and if they report me I'll be fired, and this job is all I have to live on."

"Well, I wouldn't want to lose mine either," the good priest replied, his voice beginning to show emotion.

"Oh, but what a difference!" the jailer exclaimed. "You, Father, everybody knows you've got eight hundred a year, so things are always going to be sunny for you . . ."

Such are the events that, with commentary generously added, with twenty different kinds of exaggeration, had for the next two days been stirring up all the hateful passions in the pretty little town of Verrières. And at that very moment they served as the text for a little conversation Monsieur de Rênal was having with his wife. That morning, he had taken Monsieur Valenod, director of the poorhouse, along with him to the priest's house in order to express his extreme displeasure. Monsieur Chélan had no powerful protectors: he felt the full weight of their words.

“Well then, gentlemen! I’ll be the third priest in the area to be dismissed from my parish at eighty years of age.<sup>18</sup> I’ve been here fifty-six years, and I’ve baptized nearly every resident of the town, which was only a village when I came. Every day I marry young people whose grandparents I married before them. Verrières is my family, but when I saw this stranger, I said to myself: This gentleman from Paris—now, he might be a Liberal, and I agree there are too many of them these days, but what harm can he possibly do to our poor and our prisoners?”

At this, the reproaches of Monsieur de Rênal became more bitter, and they were outdone by those of Monsieur Valenod, director of the poorhouse.

“All right, gentlemen! Throw me out,” cried the old priest, his voice trembling. “But I’ll go on living here. Everybody knows that forty-eight years ago I inherited some land that brings in eight hundred a year. I’ll live on that income. My position doesn’t give me any nice little side earnings for my personal savings, and maybe that’s why I’m not particularly afraid when people threaten to take it away from me.”

Now, Monsieur de Rênal had a perfectly fine relationship with his wife, who had a very wealthy aunt.<sup>19</sup> But when she timidly hazarded the question, “Well, what harm *can* the man from Paris do to the prisoners?”, he hardly knew what to say, and he was on the verge of losing his temper when she suddenly cried out. The second of their sons had just climbed up onto the parapet of the retaining wall and was running along it, though the parapet was some twenty feet above the vineyard on the other side. Fear of startling her son and making him fall kept Madame de Rênal from calling him. Finally the boy, laughing delightedly at his own bravery, turned and looked at his mother, saw how pale with fright she was, and leaped down from the wall to run to her. He was thoroughly scolded.

This little event changed the course of the conversation.

“I’ve decided: I’ll hire young Sorel, the sawmill owner’s son,” Monsieur de Rênal said. “He can keep an eye on the children, because they’re becoming too much for us. He’s a young priest, or practically a priest anyway, good with Latin, and he can teach the children. The priest tells me he has a good char-

acter. I'll pay him three hundred along with his board. I do have my doubts about his morality, because he was the favorite of that old surgeon, the Legion of Honor man, the one who came to live with the Sorels claiming to be a cousin of theirs. He might very well have been a secret agent for the Liberals: he kept saying our mountain air was good for his asthma, but nobody ever saw any proof of that. He took part in all the Italian campaigns of Buonaparté,<sup>20</sup> even though, people say, he voted no to the Empire back then.<sup>21</sup> This Liberal taught young Sorel his Latin and bequeathed him all those books he brought along with him. So I never would have dreamed of having that carpenter's son anywhere near our children, but the priest—just the day before the day of our quarrel, which for me is a permanent rupture—told me that this Sorel has been studying theology for three years now, with the intention of entering the seminary. So he can't be a Liberal, and he's a Latinist.

"This arrangement has other advantages too," Monsieur de Rênal continued, looking at his wife with a diplomatic air. "Valenod takes great pride in the two fine Norman horses he's bought for his calèche. But he has no tutor for his children."

"So he might swoop in and take ours."

"You approve of my plan then?" Monsieur de Rênal said, thanking his wife with a smile for the excellent idea she had just had. "Fine, it's settled."

"Oh, good heavens! My dear friend, you do make up your mind in a hurry."

"That's because I happen to have character, and that priest has just seen it. No point in pretending: we're surrounded by Liberals here. All the cloth merchants are jealous of me, I know that for a fact, and two or three of them are getting rich. Well, I like the idea of them seeing the children of Monsieur de Rênal making their way along the promenade in the company of *their tutor*.<sup>22</sup> That'll impress them. My grandfather used to tell us about having had a tutor when he was young. That's probably going to cost me a hundred écus,<sup>23</sup> but we need to see it as an expense necessitated by our rank."

This abrupt decision made Madame Rênal pause and reflect. She was a tall, well-built woman who had once been the beauty of the neighborhood, as the phrase goes in these mountains. She had a certain simplicity about her, and

there was still youthfulness in her gait; in the eyes of a Parisian, that naive grace of hers, full of innocence and vivacity, might have given rise to some sweetly voluptuous thoughts. But if she had been made aware of such a success, Madame de Rênal would have felt only shame. There was not so much as a hint of coquetry or affectation in her heart. Monsieur Valenod, the wealthy director of the poorhouse, had, people said, paid court to her, but without success, a fact that had placed a kind of halo over her virtue, for this Monsieur Valenod, a tall young man, powerfully built, with rosy cheeks and thick black sideburns, was one of those coarse creatures, brazen and loud, that in the provinces are considered appealing men.

Madame de Rênal, a very timid woman, and one who gave the impression of being even-tempered, was nonetheless extremely put out by Monsieur Valenod's constant, restless movement and his noisy outbursts. Her repulsion at what in Verrières passes for gaiety had led people to conclude that she was overly proud of her birth. She never gave all that a thought, but she was quite pleased to see the town's inhabitants visiting her less often. We will not conceal the fact that in the eyes of *their* wives, she was a fool because, having no sense of how to manipulate her husband, she missed out on any number of excellent opportunities for getting him to buy splendid hats for her from Paris or Besançon. As long as she was allowed to wander about in her garden, she never had a complaint.

She was an uncomplicated soul, never so much as criticizing her husband or admitting that she found him rather a bore. She presumed, without ever putting it into so many words, that between husband and wife there could be no more tender relations. She loved Monsieur de Rênal most when he spoke about his plans for the future lives of their children: one was to go into the military, the second into the magistracy, and the third into the Church. All in all, she found Monsieur de Rênal much less boring than all the other men she knew.

This conjugal judgment was sound. The mayor of Verrières had the reputation of a man of wit, of just the right tone, which he had won on the basis of half a dozen little pleasantries he had inherited from an uncle. Before the Rev-

olution, old Captain Rênal had served in the infantry regiment of the Duke of Orléans, and when he went to Paris he had been admitted into the prince's salons. There he had seen Madame de Montesson, the famous Madame de Genlis, and Monsieur Ducrest, the creator of the Palais-Royal.<sup>24</sup> These three figured all too prominently in Monsieur de Rênal's anecdotes. But little by little, the memory of such things, which took some effort and finesse to relate, became burdensome to him,<sup>25</sup> and for some time lately he had only told his anecdotes about the House of Orléans on grand occasions. Since he had a real refinement—in everything except matters of money, of course—it was reasonable that he should pass for the most aristocratic person in Verrières.

## 4

# A FATHER AND SON

“Is it my fault if things are like this?”

**MACHIAVELLI**

My wife is certainly no fool! the mayor of Verrières said to himself the next day at six in the morning as he made his way down the hill to old Sorel's sawmill. No matter what I said to her about maintaining my superior social rank, it never would have occurred to me that if I didn't hire on the little Sorel, who, they say, knows his Latin like an angel, that poorhouse director, who's always scheming, would have had the same idea and snatched him away from me. And then, just imagine the tone he'd take when he'd start talking about his children's tutor! . . . Now, this tutor, once he's mine—I wonder if he'll wear a cassock?

Monsieur de Rênal was absorbed in that concern when he saw a peasant in the distance, a man about six feet tall, who now, in the early light of the day, seemed to be busy measuring pieces of wood laid out alongside the Doubs, on

the towpath. The peasant didn't look particularly pleased to see the mayor approaching him, for the pieces of wood were blocking the pathway and thus were stacked illegally.

Old Sorel—for it was he—was completely surprised and even more delighted with the extraordinary proposition Monsieur de Rênal made to him regarding his son Julien. But even so, he never let his face show anything but that sorrowful discontent that the cunning inhabitants of these mountains always assume. Slaves during the era of Spanish rule, they retain even today that physiognomic trait that also marks the Egyptian fellah.

Sorel's first response was only a lengthy recital of all the respectful phrases he had learned by heart. As he mechanically pronounced all those empty words, accompanying them with an awkward smile that actually strengthened the impression his face already gave of the man being a shifty good-for-nothing, the busily active mind of the old peasant was rapidly calculating what reason could have impelled so important a personage to want to hire his useless son. He was not at all pleased with his son, and yet this was the one being offered the unheard-of wage of three hundred a year, along with both his food and clothing. The latter stipulation had been put forth by the old man on the spur of the moment, and it was just as quickly accepted by Monsieur de Rênal.

This demand made the mayor reflect. Since Sorel is neither delighted nor overwhelmed by my proposition, as he clearly ought to be, this can only mean, he said to himself, that he's already had another offer, and who else could have made such an offer? It must be Valenod! It was in vain for Monsieur de Rênal to try convincing Sorel to come to an agreement on the spot. The old peasant's cunning made him stubbornly hold out; he wanted, he said, to consult his son first—as if, in the provinces, a rich father would take the trouble to consult with a penniless son, except for form's sake.

A sawmill consists of a shed next to a stream. The roof is held up by a framework supported by four thick wooden pillars. Eight or ten feet above the ground, in the middle of that framework, one sees a saw rising and descending, while a very simple mechanism pushes a piece of wood up to that saw. The mechanism is simply a wheel set in motion by the stream, which thus powers



both parts of the machine: the saw moving up and down, and the part that pushes the piece of wood into the saw, which cuts it into planks.

Approaching his mill, old Sorel called out for Julien in his stentorian voice; there was no response. He saw only his two elder sons, giants of a sort who, armed with heavy axes, were squaring the pine trunks, which they would later carry to the saw. Completely focused on following precisely the black line traced along the piece of wood, they sent huge chunks of wood flying with each blow of their axes. They didn't hear their father's call. The latter turned and went into the shed; he looked in vain for Julien in the place he was supposed to be, standing next to the saw. He looked up and saw him, five or six feet above the ground, straddling one of the roof beams. Instead of attentively watching the mechanism as it worked, Julien was reading. There was nothing old Sorel hated worse than that. He might have pardoned Julien his thin physique, unsuited to hard work, and so different from those of his two brothers, but this mania for reading was simply odious to him, being unable to read himself.

He called Julien two or three times in vain. The attention the young man was giving to his book, even more than the noise of the saw, kept him from hearing the terrible voice of his father. Finally, despite his age, the old man leaped up onto the tree trunk that was being sawed, and from there onto the crossbeam supporting the roof. A violent blow sent the book Julien was reading flying down into the stream; a second one, just as violent, landed on his head in the form of a box on the ear, and this one made Julien lose his balance. He was about to tumble down from a height of some twelve or fifteen feet into the machinery below, which would have been the end of him, but his father caught on to him with his left hand as he fell.

"You lazy dog! Are you going to read your damn books while you're supposed to be minding the saw? Read them in the evenings, when you go waste your time with the priest, if you don't mind!"

Though dazed by the blow, blood running down his face, Julien hurried to take up his official position next to the saw. There were tears in his eyes, though they were less because of his physical pain and more because of the book he had lost, one he particularly adored.

“Get down here, you animal—I want to speak to you.” The noise made by the machine again kept Julien from hearing his father’s command. The old man had got all the way down and didn’t want to climb back up onto the machine, so he went and found a long stick that was used for knocking walnuts out of trees, and he hit Julien on the shoulder with it. The instant Julien was down on the floor, old Sorel was rudely pushing him outside and toward the house. God only knows what he’s going to do to me! the young man thought. As they proceeded, he sadly looked down and saw the stream into which his book had fallen; it was the book he valued above all others, the *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*.<sup>27</sup>

His cheeks were red and his eyes lowered. He was a small young man, about eighteen or nineteen, weak looking, with irregular but delicate features and an aquiline nose. His large black eyes, which, in tranquil moments, suggested both a reflective and a fiery spirit, were now animated with the fiercest expression of hatred. His dark chestnut hair grew low on his brow, and when he was angry, this gave him a wicked appearance. Among all the numberless varieties of the human physiognomy, none are more immediately striking than Julien’s. A slim, well-shaped figure suggested nimbleness and agility rather than strength. When he was a child, his always thoughtful air and his remarkable pallor led his father to think either that he would not survive at all, or that, if he did, he would live to be a burden on his family. Viewed with contempt by everyone else in the household, he hated his brothers and his father; during Sunday sports on the public square, he was always beaten.

It was only over the past year or so that his pretty face began to win him some friendly support from the girls.<sup>28</sup> Despised by everyone as a weakling, Julien had come to adore the old surgeon-major who dared, one day, to criticize the plane trees to the mayor.

This surgeon sometimes paid old Sorel the boy’s wages for the day and took him off to teach him Latin and history, or rather what he knew of history, which was limited to the 1796 campaign in Italy. When he died, he bequeathed the boy his cross of the Legion of Honor, what was left of his pension, and thirty

or forty volumes, the most precious of which had just fallen into the public stream, which had been diverted on the orders of the mayor.

When they entered the house, Julien felt his father's powerful hand clutch his shoulder, and he trembled, expecting further blows.

"Now tell me, and don't lie," the old peasant bellowed at him, his hand spinning him around as easily as a child spins a toy soldier. The big, black, tear-filled eyes of Julien turned to face the little, gray, nasty eyes of the old carpenter, who seemed to be trying to look down into the depths of the boy's soul.

## 5

# A NEGOTIATION

*Cunctando restituit rem.*

"by delaying, he saved the situation."

**ENNIUS**

"Now tell me, and don't lie, if you can, you disgusting bookworm: how did you meet Madame de Rênal—when did you talk with her?"

"I've never talked with her," Julien replied. "I've only ever seen the lady at church."

"But you got a good look at her, you bold little animal!"

"Never! You know perfectly well that when I'm in the church, I only have eyes for God," Julien added with the kind of hypocritical air that he hoped would keep his father from hitting him again.

"Well, something's going on here," the shrewd old peasant replied, and he paused for a moment. "But I'm not going to get anything more out of you, you miserable hypocrite. Fact is, I'm getting rid of you, and it's only going to make my saw run better. You've sweet-talked the priest or somebody, and they've got

you a nice place. Go pack your things, and I'll take you to Monsieur de Rênal's house. You're going to be the tutor for their children."

"What are they giving me for it?"

"Your food, your clothing, and a three-hundred-franc salary."

"I don't want to be a servant."

"Animal, who's talking about being a servant? Would I let my son be a servant?"

"But who will they have me eating with?"

This question puzzled old Sorel, sensing that if he talked any more about it, he might say something that would ruin the deal. He flew into a rage against Julien, hurling insults at him, accusing him of being greedy, and he stomped off to consult his other sons.

Soon after, Julien saw them all together and leaning on their axes as they conferred. He watched them for a long while, but seeing he would be unable to divine anything from watching, he went and stood over on the far side of the saw so that no one could take him unaware. He wanted to think about this surprise announcement that was changing his destiny, and he felt incapable of acting prudently; his imagination was entirely focused on picturing what he might see inside the fine house of Monsieur de Rênal.

But I'll have to give all that up, he said to himself, if they're going to degrade me by making me eat with the servants. My father will want to force me, but I'd rather die. I have fifteen francs and eight sous put away. I'll make my escape tonight, and in two days, if I take side roads where I won't be in danger of running into gendarmes, I'll be in Besançon. Once there, I'll enlist as a soldier and, if necessary, cross over into Switzerland. But then it'll be goodbye to my dreams of advancement, goodbye to all my ambitions, and goodbye to that excellent priesthood that's such a great stepping-stone to everything.

This horror at the idea of eating with the servants had not come naturally to Julien; he would have done far worse things in the interest of seeking his fortune. He picked up this repugnance from reading Rousseau's *Confessions*.<sup>30</sup> This was the book that did the most in forming his imagined picture of the world. The bulletins of Napoleon's Grand Armée and the *Mémorial de Sainte-*

*Hélène* completed his Koran. He would have sacrificed his life for those three books. He never believed in any others. He had absorbed something the old surgeon-major used to say, that all other books are liars, written by swindlers for their own self-advancement.

Along with his fiery spirit, Julien had one of those surprising memories that so often accompany foolish behavior. To win over the old priest Chélan, upon whom he could see his entire future depending, he had memorized the whole of the New Testament in Latin; he also knew Monsieur de Maistre's book *On the Pope*, and he believed just as much in the one as he did in the other.<sup>31</sup>

As if by mutual agreement, Sorel and his son spoke no more of the matter that day. When night fell, Julien went to the priest's for his theology lesson, but he decided it would not be prudent to mention anything about the strange proposal that had been made to his father. This whole thing might be some kind of trap, he thought, so I should act as if I've forgotten all about it.

Early the next morning, Monsieur de Rênal sent for old Sorel, who, after having made him wait for an hour or two, finally appeared at the mayor's door, making a hundred excuses intermixed with about the same number of bows. Having run through a long series of quibbles, Sorel was given to understand that his son would eat with the master and mistress of the house, except for days they were entertaining, in which case he would eat in a separate room with the children. Following his natural inclination to raise more difficulties the more anxious he observed the mayor to be, and consumed as he always was with a mix of defiance and bewilderment, Sorel asked to see the room in which his son would sleep. It was a large room, nicely furnished, into which the servants were busily moving the children's beds.

This detail was like a flash of illumination for the old peasant; he at once asked to see the clothes they would be giving his son. Monsieur de Rênal opened his wallet and took out one hundred francs.

"With this money, your son can go to Monsieur Durand's shop and pick up a good black suit."

"And when I take the boy back," said the peasant, forgetting entirely to follow his usual kowtowing formulas, "we get to keep the suit?"

“Of course.”

“All right,” said Sorel in a slow, drawling voice, “so there’s just one more thing to settle, and that’s the money you’re going to be paying him.”

“What!” cried Monsieur de Rênal indignantly. “We settled that yesterday: I’ll pay three hundred francs. I think that’s plenty, and maybe even too much.”

“Sure, that was your offer, I don’t deny that,” said old Sorel, speaking even more slowly now; and with a sudden inspiration that will astonish only those readers who do not know the peasants of the Franche-Comté, he looked Monsieur de Rênal in the face, and added:

*“We can do better elsewhere.”*

The mayor’s face betrayed his astonishment. But he quickly recovered his composure, and after a subtle conversation that went on for a full two hours, the old peasant’s cunning won out over that of the rich man, for the latter did not need it to survive. All the many articles that were to govern Julien’s life were agreed upon: not only was his salary increased to four hundred francs, but it was to be paid in advance on the first of each month.

“Very well,” said Monsieur de Rênal. “I’ll give him thirty-five francs.”<sup>32</sup>

“To make it easier, a rich and generous man such as yourself,” said the peasant, in a wheedling voice, “ought to bump that up to thirty-six francs.”<sup>33</sup>

“All right,” said Monsieur de Rênal, “but that’s the end of it.” His rising anger gave a tone of real determination to his voice, and the peasant could see there would be no further gains to be made. Now Monsieur de Rênal was in the driver’s seat. He refused to give the thirty-six francs to old Sorel, who was eagerly trying, as a stand-in for his son, to get his hands on the money. Monsieur de Rênal was realizing that he would need to report to his wife on how the negotiation went, and the part he had played.

“Give me back the hundred francs I just gave you,” he said with some heat. “Monsieur Durand is in debt to me. I’ll go with your son to get the black suit.” After this display of decisiveness, Sorel prudently went back to repeating his formulas of respect; these occupied a quarter of an hour. Ultimately, seeing there was nothing more to be gained, he retired. His final bow was accompanied by these words:

“I’ll send my son to the château.”

This was what Monsieur de Rênal’s underlings called the house when they wanted to flatter him.

Returning to his mill, Sorel looked for his son, but in vain. Worried about what might be about to happen to him, Julien had gone out in the middle of the night, intending to get his books and his cross of the Legion of Honor to a safe place. He had taken everything to the home of a young timber merchant, a friend of his named Fouqué, who lived upon the mountainside above Verrières.

When he returned: “God only knows, you lazy wretch,” his father said, “if you’ll ever be honorable enough to repay me for the food I’ve been advancing you over all these years! Pack up your rags and get up to the mayor’s!”

Astonished that he was not being beaten, Julien hurried to be gone. But once he was out of sight from his terrible father, he slowed his pace. He thought that stopping in the church on the way to make a Station might be useful for his hypocritical aims.<sup>34</sup>

The word surprises you? Well, to arrive at such an ugly concept, the soul of this young peasant had had to traverse quite a path.

From his earliest childhood, he had seen dragoons from the Sixth Regiment, wearing their long white cloaks, their helmets trailing crests of black horsehair, on their way back from the campaign in Italy.<sup>35</sup> He watched them tie up their horses, using the bars on the window of his father’s house, and the sight made him mad with desire to be in the military. Later, he thrilled to tales about the Battles of the Lodi Bridge, of Arcole, and of Rivoli that the old surgeon-major told him.<sup>36</sup> He saw the burning intensity with which the old man looked at his cross of the Legion of Honor.

But when Julien was fourteen, a new church was being erected in Verrières, one that might be deemed rather magnificent for such a small town. Most remarkable were the four marble columns, the sight of which made an impression on Julien; they became famous in the region because of the mortal hate they engendered between the justice of the peace and the young vicar sent over from Besançon, who was rumored to be a spy for the Congrégation.<sup>37</sup> The jus-

tice of the peace was in danger of losing his post, or at least that was what people said. After all, hadn't he had the effrontery to differ openly with a priest who, every two weeks, went to Besançon where, people said, he spoke with the bishop himself?

While this was going on, the justice of the peace, father to a large family, levied several fines that seemed unjust; all of them were levied upon residents who read *Le Constitutionnel*.<sup>38</sup> The party of right and goodness triumphed. It was, true, only a matter of three- or four-franc fines, but one of those little fines was levied against a nailmaker who was Julien's godfather. In his rage, the man exclaimed, "What a turnabout! And to think that for the last twenty years we all reckoned the justice of the peace as an honest man!" By this time, the surgeon-major, Julien's friend, was dead.

Abruptly, Julien stopped talking about Napoleon; he announced that he intended to become a priest, and thereafter he was always seen in his father's saw-mill concentrating on memorizing the Latin Bible the priest had given him. That good old man, marveling at his progress, passed entire evenings teaching him theology. Julien never uttered anything but pieties in his company. Who could have guessed that this pretty, girlish face, so pale, so sweet, could conceal an unshakable resolve to face a thousand deaths rather than give up on making his fortune?

For Julien, making his fortune meant, first, getting out of Verrières. He loathed his birthplace; everything he saw there froze his imagination.

From early childhood, he had experienced moments of exaltation. In them, he would fantasize ecstatically about the day when he would be introduced to beautiful Parisian women, and how he would know just what kind of dramatic, striking action would best attract their attention. How could he fail to be loved by one of them, just like Bonaparte, who was still poor when he was loved by the brilliant Madame de Beauharnais? For many years now, Julien rarely passed an hour without telling himself again how Bonaparte, an obscure lieutenant with no fortune to his name, made himself into the master of the whole world by means of his sword. The idea served as constant consolation



for his sufferings, which he thought were very great, and it doubled his joy when joy did sometimes come his way.

The construction of the church and the fines imposed by the justice of the peace acted upon him like a revelation; an idea occurred to him, and it nearly drove him mad for several weeks, ultimately possessing him altogether, with all the power of the first idea that a passionate spirit believes it has invented.

“When Bonaparte became famous, France was in fear of being invaded. Military merit was both necessary and in fashion. Today, we see forty-year-old priests hauling in hundred-thousand-franc stipends—in other words, three times what celebrated generals under Napoleon made. So there must be people out there supporting them. Look at that justice of the peace, a good, honest old man until now, dishonoring himself out of fear of having displeased a thirty-year-old priest. I need to become a priest.”<sup>39</sup>

Once, in the period of his newfound piety, when Julien had been studying theology for two years, he betrayed himself by letting the fire that was burning up his soul show. It happened at the home of Monsieur Chélan, at a dinner with other priests to whom the good old man was introducing him as a kind of prodigy. He forgot himself and started showering high praise on Napoleon in a ferocious outburst. Following that, he tied his right arm tightly across his chest, telling everyone he had dislocated it in carrying a pine trunk; he kept his arm in that painful position for two months. After that self-imposed penitential affliction, he forgave himself. And this is the young man of nineteen, so feeble in appearance that you would have thought him seventeen at most, toting his packet of belongings and entering the magnificent Verrières church.

He found the place dark and deserted. Due to some feast day, the windows had all been covered up with crimson material, so that when the sun was shining, the place was filled with dazzling light of the most imposing, most religious sort. Julien trembled. All alone in the church, he went over and sat on what looked like the finest pew. It carried the arms of Monsieur de Rênal.

On the prie-dieu before it, Julien noticed a scrap of printed paper, spread out there as if meant to be read. He looked at it and saw:

*Details of the execution and last moments of Louis Jenrel, executed in Besançon, the . . .*

The paper was torn. On the back, he could make out only the first two words of a line:

*The first step . . .*

Julien wondered who put the piece of paper there. Poor devil, he added with a sigh. His name ends the same way mine does. And he crumpled up the scrap of paper.

As he left, Julien thought he saw blood by the holy water fount; it was only some holy water that someone had spilled, but the red light coming in from the windows made it look like drops of blood.

But at last he felt ashamed of this secret terror.

“Am I going to turn coward?” he said to himself. “*To arms!*”

That phrase, so often repeated during the narratives of the old surgeon, was a heroic one to Julien. He straightened himself up and strode out rapidly toward Monsieur de Rênal’s house.

Despite his brave resolutions, once he saw the place from up close, he was overcome, debilitated by sheer timidity. The iron gates were open, and they seemed magnificent to him; but he had to walk in through them.

Julien was not the only one with a troubled heart in the household. A similar extreme timidity had seized Madame de Rênal as she contemplated this stranger whose duties would entail coming between her and her children. She was used to having the children sleep in her bedroom. That morning, she had shed many tears as she watched their little beds being moved into the room that was to be the tutor’s. In vain she asked her husband if the youngest, Stanislas-Xavier, could be allowed to remain with her.

Feminine delicacy reached new heights in Madame de Rênal. She pictured the most disagreeable, the coarsest, the most unkempt creature being employed to scold her children simply because he knew Latin, a barbaric tongue, for which her children would be whipped.

# ENNUI

*Non so più cosa non,*

*Cosa faccio.*

(I no longer know who I am, or what I'm doing.)

## MOZART, THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO

With all the grace and vivacity that were natural to her when she was safely out of the sight of men, Madame de Rênal was coming out of the French window of the living room into the garden when she caught sight of a young peasant, almost a child still, standing by the gate, looking extremely pale, and clearly having recently been crying. He was wearing a clean white shirt, and he carried a good violet wool jacket under his arm.

The skin of the young peasant was so white and his eyes so sweet, that the somewhat fanciful turn of Madame de Rênal's mind at first made her wonder if it were a girl in disguise, someone come to ask a favor of the mayor. She felt pity for the poor creature who had halted there at the gate, evidently lacking the courage to sound the bell. Completely distracted now from her bitter grief about the tutor's imminent arrival, she walked up to him. Julien, who stood facing the gate, didn't see her coming. He shuddered when a gentle voice, quite close to his ear, spoke:

"What are you here for, my child?"

Julien abruptly spun around, and so struck by the sight of the sheer grace of Madame de Rênal, he forgot most of his timidity. Then, stunned by her beauty, he forgot everything, including the reason he had come. Madame de Rênal repeated the question.

"I've come to be tutor, Madame," he said finally, and feeling ashamed of his tears, he tried wiping them off his cheek as best as he could.

Madame de Rênal stood there, speechless. They were quite close to each

other, and each looked at the other. Julien had never seen any creature so well dressed, and he had certainly never heard a woman, and not one with so dazzling a complexion, speak to him in so gentle a voice. Madame de Rênal gazed at the big tears that had halted their descent on the peasant's cheeks, so pale at first, and now reddening. She burst into laughter, with all the gaiety of a young girl, laughing at herself, and unable to put her finger on what it was that was causing her such happiness. Really—so this was the tutor she had imagined as a dirty, ill-dressed priest, the one who had come to scold and whip her children!

“Oh, Monsieur,” she said to him at last, “do you know Latin?” The word *Monsieur* took Julien so aback that he needed a moment before answering.

“Yes, Madame,” he said bashfully. Madame de Rênal felt such happiness that she dared to ask Julien:

“You won’t scold my poor children too harshly?”

“Me—scold them?” asked Julien, amazed. “Why would I?”

“And, Monsieur,” she continued after a brief silence, in a voice that grew increasingly heavy with emotion, “you’ll be good to them, you’ll promise me?”

Hearing himself called Monsieur again, in all seriousness, and by a lady so splendidly dressed, was beyond any fantasy Julien had ever had: in all those castles in Spain of his boyhood, he assumed that no fine lady would ever deign to speak to him until he was wearing a dashing uniform. On her side, Madame de Rênal was completely fascinated by the beautiful skin and the great black eyes of Julien, and by his pretty hair, which was curling more than usual because he had recently cooled himself off by plunging his head into the basin of the public fountain. To her great joy, she observed the girlish shyness of this fatal tutor, whose harsh and forbidding air she had so feared for her children. For a spirit as peaceable as Madame de Rênal, the contrast between what she had feared and what she now saw was a great event. At last she recovered from her surprise. She was startled to recognize that she was standing like this at the gate with a young man in his shirtsleeves—and standing very close to him too.

“Let’s go in, Monsieur,” she said in an embarrassed tone. Madame de Rênal had never in her life been moved by any sensation as purely pleasant as this;

never had so charming an apparition come to calm such terrible fears. And so, her lovely children were not about to fall into the hands of a dirty, bad-tempered priest after all. She had just crossed into the vestibule when she turned to Julien, who was timidly following her. His evident surprise at being in such a beautiful house was yet another grace in the eyes of Madame de Rênal. She still could not quite believe her eyes, for she thought a tutor ought to be wearing a black coat.

“But is it really true, Monsieur,” she said, stopping once again, mortally afraid of being in some kind of error, “that you know Latin?” The question startled Julien, dispelling the charm he been under for the past several minutes.

“Yes, Madame,” he said, trying to assume a chilly tone. “I know Latin as well as the priest, and in fact he has sometimes been kind enough to say I know it better than he does.”

Madame de Rênal thought Julien suddenly had an aggressive air about him. He had come to a stop about two paces from her. She moved closer to him, saying quietly:

“At least for the first few days, you won’t whip my children, will you, even if they haven’t done their lessons?”

That gentle, almost imploring tone, and coming from so beautiful a lady, immediately did away with whatever defense Julien was about to make of his Latin abilities. Madame de Rênal’s face was close to his, so close he could smell the perfume of a lady’s summer dress, a thing perfectly astounding to a poor peasant. Julien went a deep red and said with a sigh, his voice almost failing him:

“Don’t worry, Madame. I’ll obey you in everything.”

It was only at this moment, when all her anxiety about her children had fully dissipated, that Madame de Rênal took note of Julien’s extreme beauty. His almost feminine features and his air of embarrassment were not at all ridiculous to a woman so extremely timid herself. A more masculine air, which most people consider essential to a man’s being called good-looking, would have aroused only fear in her.

“How old are you, Monsieur?” she asked Julien.

“Almost nineteen.”

“My oldest son is eleven,” Madame de Rênal replied, reassured. “He can be almost a comrade for you. You can speak seriously with him. His father beat him once, and the boy was ill for a whole week afterward, even though it was only a very light punishment.” How different all this is from my life, Julien was thinking. Only yesterday my father beat me. How good these rich people have it!

Madame de Rênal was already sensing even the subtlest changes in the tutor’s demeanor; she saw that flicker of sadness but mistook it for shyness, and she wanted to give him courage.

“What is your name, Monsieur?” she asked, with an accent and a gracefulness whose charm Julien felt, though he could not have accounted for it.

“I’m called Julien Sorel, Madame. I’m nervous at entering a strange house for the first time in my life, and I need your protection, and you really must pardon me for many things in my first days here. I never went to school, I was too poor. I’ve never spoken to anyone except my cousin the surgeon-major, who was a member of the Legion of Honor, and Father Chélan. He’ll put in a good word for me. My brothers have always beaten me, so don’t believe any wicked things they say about me, and pardon my errors, Madame, because I swear I’ll never have any bad intentions.”

Julien calmed down during this long speech, and he began to examine Madame de Rênal. So powerful is the effect of perfect grace, when it is natural to one’s character and when, above all, the person it adorns has no idea she has that grace, that Julien, who thought of himself as a connoisseur of female beauty, would have sworn she was no more than twenty. Suddenly the thought occurred to him that he ought to kiss her hand. Just as suddenly, the idea filled him with fear. Then he said to himself, I’d be a coward not to perform an act that could turn out to be useful to me and diminish the contempt this beautiful lady probably feels for a poor laborer who’s just left his saw. Julien perhaps took heart at the memory of the phrase “good-looking boy” that, for the past six months or so, he had heard a few girls applying to him on Sundays. As this internal debate went on, Madame de Rênal was giving him a few pieces of advice

concerning how he should start with her children. The inner violence Julien felt made him turn deathly pale again, and he said, his voice tightening:

“Never, Madame. I will never beat your children. I swear it before God.” Saying this, he tried to take Madame de Rênal’s hand and raise it to his lips. She was astonished at this gesture, and shocked when she thought further upon it. It was a warm day, so her arm was entirely nude beneath her shawl, and when Julien raised her hand up to his lips, the arm was uncovered all the way to her shoulder. After a moment or two, she rebuked herself, feeling she had not been sufficiently offended, or not immediately enough.

Monsieur de Rênal, having heard voices, came out of his office; with the same air of majesty and paternalism that he deployed when he was marrying a couple in the town hall, he said to Julien:

“I need to have a word with you before the children see you.”

He led Julien into a room and had his wife come in, too, though she wanted to leave the two alone. He shut the door and seated himself with an air of solemnity.

“Father Chélan has told me you are a good sort. Everyone here will treat you with respect, and if I’m happy with you, I’ll help you get set up in life later on. I want you to see nothing of your family and friends, because their ways are not suitable for my children. Here is thirty-six francs for your first month, but I first insist you give me your word that not one sou of this will go to your father.” Monsieur de Rênal was angry with the old man who, in this affair, had outplayed him.

“And now, *Monsieur*—because my orders are for everyone in this house to address you as Monsieur, and you doubtless understand the advantage of living in a household where things are done properly—now, Monsieur, it’s not right for the children to see you wearing that jacket. Have the servants seen him?” he asked his wife.

“No, dear,” she replied, seeming lost in her own thoughts.

“All the better. Put this on,” he said to the surprised young man, handing him one of his own frock coats. “Now let’s go see the clothier, Monsieur Durand.”

Over an hour later, when Monsieur de Rênal returned with the new tutor all dressed in black, he found his wife still sitting in the same place. She felt calmed by Julien's presence, and watching him, she forgot to feel fear. But Julien wasn't thinking at all about her. Even with all his distrust of fate and humanity, his spirit at this moment was as light as a child's; it seemed like years since he had stood trembling in the church, though it had only been three hours. He noticed Madame de Rênal's cold manner, and realized she was angry with him for having kissed her hand. But the pride he felt at wearing garments so different from the kind he was used to had him practically beside himself with a joy he felt he ought to conceal, and this made his movements seem abrupt and gauche. Madame de Rênal contemplated him, astonishment in her eyes.

"A little more gravity, Monsieur," Monsieur de Rênal said to him, "if you wish to have the respect of my children and my servants."

Julien replied, "Monsieur, I'm not quite comfortable in these new clothes. I'm only a poor peasant, and I've never worn anything but jackets. If you don't mind, I'd like to go to my room and be alone for a while."

"How does our new acquisition strike you?" Monsieur de Rênal asked his wife.

It was an almost involuntary impulse, one of which she was certainly unconscious, that led her to conceal the truth from her husband.

"I'm not as enchanted as you with this little peasant. Your attentions will turn him impertinent, and we'll need to fire him in a month or so."

"Well then! We'll fire him, it'll only have cost me a hundred francs, and Verrières will have become accustomed to seeing a tutor accompanying the children of Monsieur de Rênal. And I wouldn't have accomplished that if I'd left Julien to wear his laborer's clothes. And when I do fire him, rest assured I'll hang on to the black suit I just ordered for him. He'll only keep the ready-made coat I found at the clothier's, the one he's wearing now."

The hour Julien spent off in his room seemed like a mere instant to Madame de Rênal. The children had been told their new tutor was there, and they were overwhelming her with questions. At last, Julien appeared. Now he was a different man. It would be an understatement to say he was grave; he was the very



incarnation of gravity. He was introduced to the children and spoke to them in a tone that astonished Monsieur de Rênal.

"I am here, my young gentlemen," he said to them as he came to the end of his opening remarks, "to teach you Latin. You know what reciting a lesson means. Here is the Holy Bible," he continued, showing them a little pocket-sized volume, bound in black. "This is in particular the story of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the part of the Bible called the New Testament. I am going to be asking you to recite frequently, so now I want you to have me recite." Adolphe, the oldest boy, had the Bible in his hands. "Open it anywhere," Julien went on, "and read to me the first couple of words of any verse. I will then recite the sacred book, which I have by heart, for it is the rule of conduct guiding us all. I'll go on reciting until you tell me to stop."

Adolphe opened the book, read out two words, and Julien went on to recite the entire page, as easily as if he were speaking French. The children, observing the astonishment on their parents' faces, looked on wide-eyed. A servant appeared in the doorway while Julien continued to recite in Latin. The domestic stood there, immobile, for a few moments, then disappeared. Soon Madame's personal maid and the cook appeared together in the doorway; by then, Adolphe had read out the first words of eight different sections, and Julien had continued reciting with the greatest of ease.

"Ah, good Lord! What a pretty little priest!" exclaimed the cook, who was a good, devout girl.

Monsieur de Rênal's self-esteem, however, was restless; far from even dreaming of examining the tutor, he was entirely occupied with raking through his memory in search of a few words in Latin. Finally, he came up with a line from Horace. The only Latin Julien knew was the Bible. He responded with a furrowed brow: "The holy ministry to which I have dedicated myself forbids me to read such profane poets."

Monsieur de Rênal went on to recite a great number of lines supposedly from Horace. He explained to his children who Horace was, but the children, rapt in admiration, scarcely paid any attention to him. They were looking at Julien.

The domestics still standing in the doorway, Julien felt he ought to prolong the test. Turning to the youngest of the boys, he said, "We must let Monsieur Stanislas-Xavier point me to a passage in the holy book."

Little Stanislas, his pride evident, read out the opening words of a verse quite well, and Julien recited the entire page. And as if Monsieur de Rênal's triumph simply had to be unbounded, while Julien was reciting, in came Monsieur Valenod, possessor of fine Norman horses, and Monsieur Charcot de Maugiron, subprefect of the district. The scene earned Julien the title of "Monsieur"; the servants themselves dared not refuse it to him.

That evening, all of Verrières flocked to Monsieur de Rênal's house to view the marvel. Julien responded to everyone with a somber tone, keeping them all at a distance. The report of his glory spread so rapidly through the town that Monsieur de Rênal, beginning to fear that he might lose him, proposed they sign a two-year contract.

"No, Monsieur," Julien replied coolly. "If you want to dismiss me, I'll be forced to go, and any contract that binds me without obliging you to anything is not a fair one. I must refuse."

Julien carried himself so skillfully that within a month of his arrival in the house, he had won the respect of even Monsieur de Rênal. The priest having quarreled with both Rênal and Valenod, there was nobody to betray Julien's old passion for Napoleon—of whom he now spoke only with horror.

## 7

# ELECTIVE AFFINITIES

*They can only touch the heart by wounding it.*

A MODERN AUTHOR

The children adored him, though he didn't particularly care for them; his thoughts were elsewhere.<sup>40</sup> The little brats could do nothing that would try his patience. Cold, fair, impassive, and yet loved because his arrival had, in a way, expelled all the boredom from the house, he was in fact a good tutor. On his part, he felt nothing but hatred and horror for the high society into which he had been admitted, though only to be seated at the foot of the table—a fact that might go some way toward explaining the hatred and the horror. There were certain formal dinners at which he could barely conceal his contempt for everything around him. On the feast day of Saint Louis<sup>41</sup> in particular, Monsieur Valenod was holding forth at the Rênal home, and Julien almost gave himself away; he fled into the garden, on the pretext of seeing to the children. What grand speechmaking, what praise of honesty! he said to himself. You'd think that was the only virtue, and yet look at the fawning and cheap respect they accord to that man who's obviously doubled, maybe even tripled, his fortune since becoming the man who ministers to the needs of the poor! I'd lay money on him making a profit even out of the fund for the foundlings, the ones whose sacred need is greater than anyone else's!<sup>42</sup> Monsters! Monsters! And then look at me: I'm a kind of foundling, too, hated by my father, my brothers, my whole family.

A few days prior to that Saint Louis Day, Julien had been out for a walk by himself, reciting his breviary in the little copse they called the Belvedere, overlooking the Cours de la Fidélité, when he caught sight of his two brothers on a lonely path and tried to avoid them. The envy of these crude laborers was so provoked by the sight of the fine black suit, by the extremely dignified air of their brother, and by the profound contempt he had for them, that they beat him to unconsciousness, and left him bleeding there. Madame de Rênal, out for a walk with Monsieur Valenod and the subprefect, happened by chance to walk into the copse; she saw Julien stretched out on the ground and thought he must be dead. She was so visibly upset by this that Monsieur Valenod became jealous.

But that jealousy was premature. Julien did find Madame de Rênal quite beautiful, but he hated her for her beauty; this had been the first reef on which

his future success had almost foundered. He spoke to her as little as possible in order to make her forget that foolish elation of his when, on his first day, he had raised her hand to his lips.

Élisa, Madame de Rênal's chambermaid, had not failed to fall in love with the young tutor, and she often spoke about him to her mistress. Mademoiselle Élisa's love had earned Julien the hatred of one of the valets. One day he heard that man saying to Élisa, "You never want to talk to me anymore, now that that grimy tutor has come into the house." Julien did not deserve that insult; but, with the instinct natural to a good-looking boy, he redoubled his attentions to his personal appearance. Now Monsieur Valenod's hatred of him doubled too. He said publicly that such coquetry was not suited to a young cleric. Indeed, Julien dressed as much like a cleric as he could, short of wearing the cassock itself.

Madame de Rênal noticed him speaking more than usual with Mademoiselle Élisa; she learned that the conversations were related to Julien's very small wardrobe. He had so little linen that he was obliged to send it out frequently to be washed, and Élisa had been useful in carrying out that kind of errand for him. Madame de Rênal had never suspected such extreme poverty, and she was touched; she wanted to give him some gifts, but she dared not—and that inner conflict was the first painful sensation Julien caused her. Until then, the name of Julien and the feeling of a pure, intellectual joy were synonymous for her. Tormented by the thought of his poverty, Madame de Rênal broached the subject with her husband, suggesting he might make him a gift of some linen.

"What foolishness!" he replied. "What—give presents to a man with whom we're perfectly satisfied, who serves us well? It's what you might do if he were negligent, or if we needed to stimulate his enthusiasm."

Madame de Rênal felt humiliated by this way of looking at things; she had never observed it in him before Julien came. She could never see the young cleric's simple but faultless appearance without asking herself, That poor boy—how does he manage?

Little by little, her shock concerning Julien's lacks turned to pity.

Madame de Rênal was one of those provincial women one might take for

fools, until one had spent a couple of weeks around them. She had no experience of life, and she never made any effort at conversation. Endowed with a delicate but haughty spirit, the natural, universal instinctual inclination to be happy meant that most of the time, she paid no attention whatever to the more gross beings among whom chance had placed her.

She would have been called naturally vivacious if she had received even the slightest education. But as an heiress, she was sent to be brought up by those nuns who were passionate devotees of the Sacred Heart of Jesus,<sup>43</sup> and fired with violent hatred for the French enemies of the Jesuits. Madame de Rênal had enough good sense to forget immediately, as absurd, everything she had been taught in the convent; but she had nothing to put in its place and ended up knowing nothing. The flatteries directed at her as heiress to a large fortune, together with a decided bent toward religious zeal, had created in her a completely inward way of life. Concealed behind an appearance of perfect civility and complete submission of her will, which the Verrières husbands cited to their wives as exemplary, and of which Monsieur de Rênal was mightily proud, her inner temperament stemmed in fact from the haughtiest of spirits. Any princess renowned for her pridefulness pays infinitely more attention to what her people are doing around her than this wife, so sweet, so modest in appearance, paid to anything her husband did or said. Until Julien's arrival, she had never really paid attention to anyone but her children. Their little illnesses, their sorrows, their little joys entirely occupied the mind of the creature who had never adored anyone other than God, when she was at the Sacred Heart school in Besançon.

Though she would never condescend to let anyone see it, the onset of some fever in one of her sons put her into a state little different from what she would have been in had the child actually died. But an outburst of vulgar laughter and a shrug of the shoulders, accompanied by some trite maxim about the foolishness of wives, had always been the response whenever she had mentioned one of these anxieties to her husband during the first years of her marriage. Joking like that when the subject was an illness of one of her children was like twisting a knife in Madame de Rênal's heart. And this was the replacement for all the

earnest, honied flattery she had experienced in the Jesuitical convent where she spent her youth. Her true education was in suffering. Too proud to speak about such sorrows, even to her friend Madame Derville, she assumed that all men were like her husband, Monsieur Valenod, and the subprefect Charcot de Maugiron. Vulgar, a complete insensibility to anything not related to money, social rank, or a Cross, and a blind hatred of any line of reasoning that did not conform to theirs all seemed things natural to that sex, like the wearing of boots or felt hats.

But even after long years of having to live with these money-obsessed people, Madame de Rênal was still not accustomed to it.

And this explains the success of the little peasant Julien. She discovered new, sweet pleasures aglow with the charm of novelty in her sympathies with that noble, proud spirit. Madame de Rênal soon forgave him his extreme ignorance, which was really just one added charm, and the roughness of his manners, which she succeeded in improving. She found it worth her while to listen to him, even when he spoke of the commonest things, even when it was a matter of a dog that had been run over in the road by a peasant's cart going by at a trot. The sight of it elicited a crude laugh from her husband, whereas she observed Julien wince, his fine, black eyebrows arching. Generosity, nobility of spirit, and humanity slowly came to seem to her to exist nowhere but in the young cleric. She felt all the sympathy, even admiration, that such virtues inspire in people of good breeding.

In Paris, the situation between Julien and Madame de Rênal would have been quickly simplified. But in Paris, love is the offspring of novels; the young tutor and his timid mistress would have discovered in three or four novels, or even in a few couplets from the *Gymnase*,<sup>44</sup> a clear illumination of their relationship. Novels would have instructed each of them on how to play their roles, with models for imitation; and soon enough, his vanity would have compelled Julien to follow the model, though he might have done so with almost no pleasure, even with reluctance.

In a little town in the Aveyron or the Pyrenees, the hot climate would have made even the slightest incident decisive. Under our more somber skies, an

impoverished young man, one who is only ambitious because the delicacy of his sensibility creates in him the need of some of the pleasures money can buy, can find himself in daily contact with a sincere, virtuous woman of thirty who thinks only of her children and never looks to novels for suggestions on how to conduct herself. Here, things take a long time to progress, and progress is only by degrees: it's all more natural.

Often when she thought of the young tutor's poverty, Madame de Rênal would be moved to tears. One day, Julien actually came upon her as she was crying.

"Ah, Madame, something terrible must have happened!"

"No, not at all, my friend," she said. "Call the children, and let's take a walk."

She took his arm, leaning on it in a manner that Julien thought very strange. It was the first time she had called him "my friend."<sup>45</sup>

Toward the end of their walk, Julien noticed that she was blushing deeply. She slowed her pace.

"People must have told you," she said, without looking at him, "that I'm the sole heiress to a very wealthy aunt who lives in Besançon. She showers me with presents . . . My children are making such . . . surprising progress . . . that I'd like to ask you to accept a small gift, as a token of my gratitude. It's only a matter of a few louis for you to buy linen. But . . ." She trailed off, blushing even more.

"But what, Madame?"

"There would be no reason," she went on, lowering her head, "to say anything about this to my husband."

Julien abruptly stopped walking and, his eyes afire with rage, drew himself up to his full height: "I'm of humble rank, Madame, but I am not base, a point you haven't sufficiently considered. I would be lower than a footman if I were to have to hide anything from Monsieur de Rênal concerning *my money*."

Madame de Rênal was mortified.

"The mayor," Julien continued, "has given me thirty-six francs five times now since I've come to live in his house. I'm ready to show my accounts to Monsieur de Rênal or anyone else, even that Monsieur Valenod, who hates me."

Madame de Rênal was pale and trembling after that outburst, and their walk came to an end without either of them being able to find any way to restart the conversation. Any love for Madame de Rênal was becoming more and more impossible within the proud heart of Julien; on her side, she respected him and admired him, but she had been scolded by him. On the grounds of making up for the humiliation she had unintentionally caused him, she gave herself permission to pay the tenderest attentions to him. The novelty of doing so gave Madame de Rênal real happiness for a week. These little attentions soothed Julien's anger to some extent, but he was far from seeing in them anything like a personal attraction to him.

So this is the way of the wealthy, he said to himself. They humiliate you and then they think they can make it all better with their ridiculous favors!

The heart of Madame de Rênal was too full, and it was also still too innocent, for her to keep her resolution not to tell her husband about the offer she had made to Julien, and about how he had repulsed her gesture.

"What?" Monsieur de Rênal exclaimed, extremely irritated. "You've allowed yourself to be refused by a *servant*?"

And when Madame de Rênal protested against that word:

"I'm speaking, Madame, just as the late Prince de Condé spoke when he was introducing his chamberlains to his new bride: '*All the people you see here,*' he told her, '*are our servants.*' I read you that passage from Besenval's *Mémoires*,<sup>46</sup> which is essential for understanding social rank. Everyone who's not a gentleman, who lives in your house, and who receives a salary, is your servant. I'll have a word with this Monsieur Julien and give him a hundred francs."

"But oh, my friend," Madame de Rênal said, trembling, "please don't do it in front of the servants!"

"Yes, I see your point: they might be jealous, and rightly so," her husband said, leaving the room and worrying about the size of the sum.

Madame de Rênal let herself fall back into a chair, almost fainting with sadness. He's going to humiliate Julien, and it'll be my fault! She felt horrified by her husband, and she buried her face in her hands. She made a vow to herself never to confide in him again.



When she saw Julien next, she was trembling, and her heart was so contracted within her chest that she could scarcely get a word out. Consumed with embarrassment, she took his hands in hers and pressed them tightly.

“Well, my friend,” she managed to say at last, “are you satisfied with my husband?”

“How could I not be?” he said with a bitter smile. “He’s given me a hundred francs.”

Madame de Rênal looked at him uncertainly.

“Give me your arm,” she said at last, a certain boldness in her voice that Julien had never heard before.

She dared go to the Verrières bookshop, despite its horrific reputation for liberalism. There, she picked out ten louis’ worth of books to give to her sons. But these were also books she knew Julien wanted to read. She insisted that right there in the bookshop, each child should sign his name in the book designated for him. While Madame de Rênal was quietly delighting in the amends she had the audacity to make to Julien, the latter was startled at the sheer number of books he saw on the shop’s shelves. Never had he dared set foot in so profane a place; his heart was pounding. Far from imagining what was in the heart of Madame de Rênal, he was deep in thought as to how he, as a theology student, could manage to get hold of some of those books. Soon he came up with the idea that he might, if he did it carefully enough, persuade Monsieur de Rênal that he should assign his sons to write essays on the lives of famous gentlemen who had lived in the province. After a month of slow progress, Julien saw his scheme succeed, and to such a point that soon afterward he proposed to Monsieur de Rênal an idea much harder for the noble mayor to accept: this was to contribute to the material well-being of a Liberal by taking out a subscription at the bookshop. Monsieur de Rênal readily concurred that it would be good for his children to have laid eyes on a number of works they would later hear mentioned in conversation when they moved up to the military school. Julien found the mayor unwilling to budge further on the issue. He suspected there was some secret reason, but he couldn’t guess what it was.

“I was thinking, Monsieur,” he said to him one day, “that it might be highly

inappropriate to find the name of an upstanding gentleman like a Rênal appearing on the grubby account books of a bookshop." Monsieur de Rênal's expression brightened. "And it would also be a mark against a poor theology student," Julien continued in an even humbler tone, "if someday his name were to be discovered on the ledger of a bookshop that rents out books. The Liberals could accuse me of having borrowed the most atrocious titles. Who knows if they might even go so far as to write my name in the ledger next to those kinds of books?" But Julien saw he was getting off the track, as he observed the mayor's face resume its expression of embarrassment and ill humor. Julien said no more. "I've got my man," he said to himself.

A few days later, the eldest of the boys was asking Julien about a book advertised in *La Quotidienne*,<sup>47</sup> in the presence of Monsieur de Rênal.

"We could avoid providing any reason for the Jacobins to gloat," said the young tutor, "and at the same time give me the means to respond to young Master Adolphe, by having one of your lowest servants take out a subscription at the bookshop."

"Not such a bad idea," said Monsieur de Rênal, clearly delighted.

"But one must be careful to stipulate," said Julien, taking on that solemn, almost miserable air that is so well suited to certain people when they see their long-laid plans finally bearing fruit, "one must stipulate that the servant is never to take out any novel. Once such dangerous books are in the house, they can corrupt Madame's maids, and the servant himself."

"Yes, but don't forget the political pamphlets," said Monsieur de Rênal with a haughty air. He was trying to conceal the admiration he felt for the clever *mezzo-termine*<sup>48</sup> the tutor of his children had come up with.

Julien's life thus became a sequence of little negotiations; and their success occupied his attention far more than the feeling of marked partiality that was so clear, so ready to be observed in the heart of Madame de Rênal.

The emotional situation he had always lived in was now replicated in the home of the Mayor of Verrières. There, just as in his father's sawmill, he deeply despised the people around him, and he was hated by them. Now, every day he could see in the conversation of the subprefect and of Monsieur Valenod,

as well as other friends who frequented the house, how little their ideas conformed with reality. Some act struck them as admirable? Without fail, it was one people would find blameworthy. His hidden, interior retort to them was always: What monsters! Or what fools! The comedy in the situation lay in the fact that, despite all his pride, he scarcely understood any part of what they were talking about.

In his whole life, the only person he'd ever spoken to with sincerity was the old surgeon-major, and the few ideas he'd had were related either to Bonaparte's campaigns in Italy or to surgery. He flattered his youthful belief in his own courage by taking pleasure in the details of the most woeful operations; he would tell himself:

"I wouldn't have raised an eyebrow."

The first time Madame de Rênal tried to have a conversation with him on anything other than the children's education, he started telling stories about surgical operations; she went pale and begged him to stop.

Julien knew nothing beyond that. And so, whenever they were alone together, an extraordinary silence descended upon them. In the parlor, despite the outward humility in his mien, she could see in his eyes a sense of intellectual superiority to everyone who came to her house. Finding herself alone with him for a moment, she saw that he grew visibly embarrassed. This made her uneasy, because her feminine instincts told her that his embarrassment had nothing amorous about it.

He had derived some idea from one of the surgeon-major's descriptions of higher society, as the old man understood it, and as a result Julien felt a sense of humiliation whenever the conversation lagged between him and a woman, as if the silence were his fault. This sensation was multiplied a hundredfold when the two of them were alone together. His imagination, stuffed as it was with the most exaggerated, the most Spanish notions<sup>49</sup> of what a man ought to say when alone with a woman, offered him no help, only inadmissible suggestions. His soul was soaring in the clouds, but he could find no way to break through the humiliating silence. And hence his severe air during the long walks with Madame de Rênal and the children was worsened by intense suffering. If

he had the bad luck to dare speak, what came out was only ridiculous. To make matters even worse, he saw, and exaggerated, how absurd he was; but what he could not see was the expression in his own eyes: they were so beautiful, and they suggested so fiery a spirit that, as sometimes happens with good actors, they turned a meaningless utterance into something charming. Madame de Rênal noticed that when he was alone with her, he never managed to speak well except when he had been distracted by some unexpected little event, when he was no longer torturing himself trying to forge a compliment. Other visitors had not spoiled her by constantly presenting her with new and brilliant ideas, so she took pleasure in the little flashes of Julien's intelligence.

Since the fall of Napoleon, even the slightest hint of gallantry has been most severely banned from the conversation and the ways of life in the provinces. People are too afraid of losing their positions. Rogues and frauds look to the Congrégation for support, and hypocrisy has made superb progress even among the Liberal classes. Tedium is on the rise. The only pleasures left are reading and agriculture.

Madame de Rênal, the wealthy heiress of a pious aunt, married at sixteen to a respectable gentleman, had never in her life felt or seen anything remotely resembling love. Not long since, her confessor, good Father Chélan, was the only one who had ever spoken to her about love, and that was in relation to the advances of Monsieur de Valenod; it had left her with an image so disgusting that the word suggested only the most abject libertinism to her. The love she found described in the very few novels that chance had made available to her seemed to be some kind of exception, or perhaps something that did not really occur in nature. Thanks to this ignorance, Madame de Rênal remained perfectly content, continually preoccupied with Julien, and far from reproaching herself in any way.

## SOME LITTLE EVENTS

*Then there were sighs, the deeper for suppression,  
And stolen glances, sweeter for the theft,  
And burning blushes, though for no transgression.*

**DON JUAN, CANTO I, STANZA 74<sup>50</sup>**

The angelic sweetness of Madame de Rênal, arising both from her own nature and from her present state of happiness, was only slightly disturbed when she happened to think about her maid Élisabeth. The girl had come into an inheritance, and she had confessed to Father Chélan that she was making a plan to marry Julien. The priest felt sincere joy for his young friend's good fortune; but he was startled to hear Julien tell him, in the most resolute terms, that he was not interested in Mademoiselle Élisabeth's offer.

"Take care, my son, and look closely at what's going on in your heart," said the priest with a frown. "I congratulate you on your vocation, if that's what's making you scorn a fortune that would be more than sufficient. I've been the curé here at Verrières for fifty-six years now, and even so, it would appear that I'm about to be pushed out of my post. This is a real affliction to me, even though I've got an income of eight hundred a year. I'm telling you these specifics because I want to be sure you have no illusions about what awaits you if you become a priest. If you have it in your head to pay court to powerful men, your eternal ruin is assured. You can heap up a fortune, but it'll have to come at the expense of the poor, and you'll need to flatter the subprefect, the mayor, every important person, and be the servant of their passions. Such conduct, which the world calls knowing how it's done, may not be absolutely incompatible with salvation among the laity. But for us, we need to choose heaping up a fortune in this world or in the next—there's no middle ground. Come then,

my dear friend, go off and reflect a little, and come back in a few days to give me your definitive answer. It pains me, but I detect a dark fire burning deep within your character, and it does not suggest the moderation or the perfect rejection of the advantageous things of this world that a priest needs. I see much good in your intellectual abilities, but please allow me to say,” the priest added, tears standing in his eyes, “if you become a priest, I tremble for your salvation.”

Emotion swelled up in Julien, and he felt ashamed of it. For the first time in his life, he felt loved; he shed sweet tears, and went off into the great forest above Verrières to hide his weeping.

Why do I feel this way? he asked himself. I know I’d give my life a hundred times over for that priest, even though he just got done telling me I’m nothing but a fool. He’s the one I most need to deceive, and he’s the one who sees right through me. That secret fire he saw in me—that’s my ambition to make my fortune. He thinks I’m not worthy to be a priest, and at exactly the moment when I was trying to convince him that my sacrificing a fifty-louis income was evidence of my piety and my vocation.

In the future, Julien continued, I have to rely only on those elements in my character that I’ve tried and proved. How could I guess that I’d be finding such pleasure in shedding these tears? Or that the man I’d love best would be the one who thinks I’m a fool?

Three days later, Julien had found the pretext he should have used to begin with: it was a calumny, but what’s the difference? He admitted to the priest, using a great deal of hesitation, that there was something he couldn’t talk about, because it would do harm to a third party, and that this was why he declined the proposed marriage. Speaking of it would be an attack on Élisabeth’s character. Monsieur Chélan found in Julien a certain worldly vehemence, something quite different from what ought to motivate a young Levite.<sup>51</sup>

After a pause, he said, “My friend, be a good country bourgeois. Be respectable, and be educated, but don’t be a priest without a vocation.”

Julien replied to this very well in terms of the rhetoric he used. He found the words a fervent young seminarian would have used, but the tone in which

he spoke them, and the barely concealed fire in his eyes, alarmed Monsieur Chélan.

We shouldn't automatically foresee a bad end for Julien; he came up with exactly the language a prudent, cunning hypocrisy demanded. And that's not bad for somebody his age. Now, as for his tone and his gestures, well, he had been living among country people, so he had been deprived of the chance to observe the truly great models. And as it would turn out later, once he had been allowed to mingle with those gentlemen, his gestures quickly became as admirable as his words.

Madame de Rênal was surprised to see that her maid's inheritance didn't seem to make the girl any happier; she saw her going off to see the priest and returning with tears in her eyes. At last, Élisabeth told her about the marriage.

Madame de Rênal felt as if she had come down with some illness; a sort of fever kept her from sleeping. She felt alive only when she was in the presence of either the maid or Julien. Her thoughts constantly focused on them and on the happiness they would have together. The poverty of the little house where they would live on their income of fifty louis shone in her imagination with magnificent colors. Julien perhaps would become a lawyer at Bray, the subprefecture two leagues distant from Verrières; and in that case, she would see him again once in a while.

Madame de Rênal genuinely believed she might be going mad; she said as much to her husband and promptly fell ill. That very evening, when her chambermaid was bringing in her dinner, she saw the girl had been crying. She detested Élisabeth at that moment, and she had just spoken harshly to her; now she apologized to her. At that, Élisabeth's weeping redoubled; she said that if her mistress would permit it, she would tell her what was making her weep so.

"Go ahead," said Madame de Rênal.

"Well, Madame, he's rejected me. Some wicked people have been saying bad things about me, and he believed them."

"Who rejected you?" Madame de Rênal asked, holding her breath.

"Julien, Madame, who else?" replied the chambermaid, breaking anew into

tears. "Father Chélan couldn't overcome his resistance, because Father thinks he shouldn't refuse a decent girl just because she's been a chambermaid, and after all, Julien's father was only a carpenter, and as for Julien himself, how was he going to make a living, before he came here to Madame's?"

Madame de Rênal was no longer listening; she felt a happiness so excessive that it nearly deprived her of reason. She made Élisabeth repeat, several times, that it was definite, that Julien had decisively refused, and that there was no way he might relent and come to a wiser decision.

"I'll try one more time," she told the maid. "I'll speak to Monsieur Julien."

The next day after lunch, Madame de Rênal gave herself the delicious pleasure of pleading her rival's cause and of seeing Élisabeth's hand, and her fortune, refused over and over for an hour.

Little by little Julien loosened up, abandoning his stiff, formal replies and making intelligent replies to Madame de Rênal's wise counsels. She could no longer resist the torrents of joy inundating her soul now after so many days of despair. This made her genuinely ill. When she was assisted back into her bedroom and comfortably settled, she ordered everyone to leave her alone. She was profoundly astonished.

Am I in love with Julien? she asked herself.

This discovery, which at any other time would have plunged her into deep remorse and turmoil, now appeared to her only like something extraordinary but somehow indifferent. Her spirit, exhausted by all she had been feeling, no longer had any resources to devote to the passions.

Madame de Rênal wanted to work, but she fell into a deep sleep. When she awoke, she was less frightened than she should have been. She was too happy to see the harm in anything. Naïve and innocent, this respectable provincial woman had never tormented her soul to try to make it feel some new sensation, some new pleasure or some new pain. Entirely absorbed, before the arrival of Julien, in that endless pile of daily tasks that, far from Paris, comprise the usual lot of a respectable mother, Madame de Rênal thought of the passions the way we think of the lottery: undoubtedly a scam, the kind of happiness only fools pursue.



The bell for dinner sounded; Madame de Rênal blushed deeply when she heard Julien bringing in the children. Becoming a little shrewd since she had fallen in love, she explained her blush by complaining of a terrible headache.

“Just like a woman!” exclaimed Monsieur de Rênal with a vulgar laugh. “There’s always something out of whack with their machinery.”

Though she was accustomed to that sort of wit, the tone of his voice shocked Madame de Rênal. To distract herself, she turned to gaze at Julien’s face; he could have been the ugliest man in the world, and at this moment he still would have looked wonderful to her.

Careful to copy the ways of people at the royal court, when springtime came, Monsieur de Rênal took the whole family off to Vergy; this is the village made famous by the tragedy of Gabrielle.<sup>52</sup> Some few hundred yards away from the very picturesque ruins of an old Gothic church, Monsieur de Rênal owned an old château with four towers and a garden designed to mimic the Tuileries, with boxwood borders and pathways lined with chestnut trees, trimmed and clipped twice a year. There was a field next to it, planted with apple trees and suitable for walks. At one end of the orchard grew about ten magnificent walnut trees, their immense foliage rising up nearly eighty feet.

“Every one of those damned walnut trees,” Monsieur de Rênal liked to say whenever his wife expressed her admiration for them, “costs me half an acre’s worth of harvest. The wheat won’t grow under their shade.”

The view of the countryside seemed new to Madame de Rênal; she expressed her admiration in nearly ecstatic terms. The new feeling coursing through her made her wittier and more determined. On the second day in Vergy, Monsieur de Rênal having gone back to town to attend to some mayoral business, Madame de Rênal hired some laborers at her own expense. Julien had given her the idea of a little sandy path that could wind around the orchard and beneath the great walnut trees; the children could walk on it in the early mornings without getting their shoes wet from dew. The idea went from conception to execution in under twenty-four hours. Madame de Rênal spent the whole day happily with Julien, directing the workers.

When the Mayor of Verrières returned from town, he was greatly surprised

to find the path completed. His arrival was a surprise to Madame de Rênal too: she had entirely forgotten his existence. For the next two months he kept referring, with irritation, to her audacity in having so important an *improvement to the property* done without consulting him; but Madame de Rênal had paid for it herself, and this consoled him somewhat.

She spent whole days playing with the children in the orchard, chasing butterflies. They had fashioned some large nets using clear gauze, with which they captured the poor Lepidoptera, to use the barbarous term Julien had taught Madame de Rênal. She had gone to Besançon to buy the splendid book by Monsieur Godart, and Julien now could read to her concerning the strange ways of the unfortunate little creatures.<sup>53</sup>

Pitilessly, they stuck them with pins and fastened them onto a large cardboard frame that Julien had prepared.

This afforded, at long last, a topic for conversation between Madame de Rênal and Julien, so that he was no longer subjected to the hideous tortures that those moments of silence inflicted upon him.

They talked incessantly together, and with intense interest, but always on completely innocent subjects. This life—active, busy, cheerful—suited everyone there, except Mademoiselle Élixa, who felt she was being worked to death. “Not even at Carnival time,” she said, “or when there’s a ball in Verrières, have I seen Madame be so fussy over her appearance. She changes her dresses two or three times a day.”

Since we have no intention of merely flattering anyone, we will not deny that Madame de Rênal, who had beautiful skin, had some of her dresses cut to expose her arms and bosom more fully. She did have a superb figure, and dressing in this way made her ravishing.

“You’ve never *been so young*, Madame,” said her Verrières friends when they came to Vergy for a dinner. (It’s the kind of thing people say in the region.)

A strange thing, one people like us might find it difficult to believe, was that Madame de Rênal had no particular intention in taking so much trouble over her appearance. She took pleasure in doing so and gave it no more thought than that; so that whenever she wasn’t chasing butterflies with the children and

Julien, she was working with Élisabeth in making dresses. The only time she went to Verrières was out of a desire to buy some new summer dresses that had just come in from Mulhouse.

When she returned to Vergy, she brought back with her a young woman, a relative. Since her marriage, Madame de Rênal had gradually become very close to Madame Derville, who had been a schoolmate at the Sacred Heart school.

Madame Derville was always terribly amused at what she called her cousin's crazy ideas. "Now, I'd never have thought of *that* on my own," she would say. These little outbursts, which Parisians would have called witticisms, made Madame de Rênal feel ashamed when she was around her husband, as if she had said something foolish, but the presence of Madame Derville gave her courage. She would confide her thoughts shyly at first, but when the two women had been together for any length of time, Madame de Rênal's wit came to life, and a long, solitary morning would go by in what felt like an instant, leaving the two friends in high spirits. But on this visit, the sensible Madame Derville found her cousin laughing a great deal less but seeming a great deal happier.

For his part, Julien had been living like a child since coming to the country, as happy to chase butterflies as were his young charges. After living under so much constraint, always having to be so diplomatic, he found himself alone now, far from the scrutiny of others. Instinctively feeling there was nothing to fear from Madame de Rênal, he surrendered to the sheer pleasure of existing, so powerful at his age, and of living there, among the most beautiful mountains in the world.

Soon after Madame Derville arrived, Julien felt she was a friend, and he hurried to show her the view from the far end of the new path; that view, in fact, is every bit the equal of, or perhaps superior to, the finest scenery that Switzerland and the Italian lakes can offer. If you make your way up the steep hillside that begins close by, you'll soon come to sharp precipices dotted with oak forests that extend almost down to the river itself. And it was up onto the summits of those steep crags that Julien—happy, free, and even better, the lord

of the whole house—led the two friends, delighting in their admiration of the sublime view.

“For me, this is like the music of Mozart,” said Madame Derville.

The jealousy of his brothers and the presence of his tyrannical, foul-tempered father had ruined the countryside around Verrières for Julien. But at Vergy, there were no traces of those bitter memories; for the first time in his life, he looked around and saw no enemies. When Monsieur de Rênal was back in town, which was often, he boldly read books. Soon, instead of doing his reading at night, but still being careful to hide his lamp under an overturned flowerpot, he gave himself up to sleep. During the day, in intervals between giving the children their lessons, he scrambled up among these rocks, carrying the book with him that was his only guide to conduct and the object of his exalted states. He found in his book happiness, ecstasy, and consolation in moments of discouragement, all at the same time.<sup>54</sup>

Certain things Napoleon claims about women, and many discussions regarding the merit of novels published under his reign, gave Julien, for the first time, some of the ideas with which any other young man would have already long been conversant.

The hot days came. The group took to passing the evenings beneath a huge lime tree just outside the house. The darkness there was profound. One evening, Julien was speaking animatedly, feeling a great pleasure at being able to speak so well to these young women; as he gestured, his hand touched that of Madame de Rênal, which was resting on the back of one of those painted wooden chairs people put in their gardens.

The hand was immediately withdrawn, but Julien thought it was his *duty* to make sure the hand was not withdrawn the next time he touched it. The idea of a duty to be carried out, as well as the idea of risking ridicule or of being left feeling inadequate if he didn't manage to carry out the duty—such thoughts immediately drained all the pleasure out of the moment.

# AN EVENING IN THE COUNTRY

*The painting Monsieur Guérin did of Dido: a charming sketch.*

STROMBECK<sup>55</sup>

The next morning, when he caught sight of Madame de Rênal again, there was a strange expression in his eyes; he watched her as if she were an enemy with whom he was going to have to do battle. The way he was looking at her, so different from the night before, made Madame de Rênal all but lose her head: she had been so good to him, and here he was, seeming angry with her. She couldn't take her eyes off his.

The presence of Madame Derville meant that Julien could talk less and concentrate more on what he was thinking about. His sole focus for the entire day was to strengthen himself by reading in that inspired book that energized his soul.

He greatly abbreviated the children's lessons, and later, when the sight of Madame de Rênal acted upon him like a call to glory, he decided she absolutely must, that evening, allow her hand to remain in his.

When the sun set, bringing the moment of decision ever closer, Julien's heart began pounding strangely. The evening came. He saw, with a joy that lifted an enormous weight from his chest, that the night would be a very dark one. The sky was thick with heavy clouds that chased overhead in a warm wind, seeming to presage a storm. The two female friends remained walking together until late. Everything they did that evening struck Julien as out of the ordinary. They reveled in the weather, a kind of setting that, for certain sensitive natures, seems to augment the pleasure of love.

At last they were all seated, Madame de Rênal next to Julien and Madame Derville on the other side of her friend. Preoccupied with his plan, Julien could think of nothing to say. The conversation languished.

Will I tremble like this and feel this miserable when I have to fight my first duel? Julien asked himself, being too distrustful of both himself and others not to observe the mental state he was in.

In this state of mortal anguish, almost any other danger would have been preferable to him. How many times did he wish something would happen to force Madame de Rênal out of the garden and back inside the house! The violent repression Julien had to maintain was far too strong for his voice not to sound altered in some way; soon, Madame de Rênal's voice seemed to be quavering, too, but Julien completely failed to notice it. The château clock struck nine forty-five without his having dared to try anything. Indignant at his own cowardice, Julien said to himself, at precisely ten o'clock I'll do what I've been planning all day to do this evening. Otherwise, I'll go up to my room and blow my brains out.

After a final stretch of anxious waiting, during which the excess of emotion Julien was feeling had him almost beside himself, the clock overhead struck ten. Each stroke the fatal clock sounded echoed deep within his chest, where he seemed to physically feel it.

At last, as the final stroke of ten was still reverberating, he stretched out his hand and took that of Madame de Rênal, who quickly withdrew it. Not knowing exactly what he was doing, Julien seized it again. As emotionally wrought as he was, the glacial coolness of her hand surprised him; he squeezed it convulsively; the hand made one final effort to withdraw, but it then remained in his.

His soul flooded with happiness, not because he loved Madame de Rênal, but because his agonizing tortures were over. So that Madame Derville would perceive none of all this, he felt he had to continue talking; his voice now became loud and forceful. The voice of Madame de Rênal, however, betrayed so much feeling that her friend thought she must be feeling ill, and she suggested they retire. Julien sensed the danger: If Madame de Rênal goes back

into the living room, I'll fall directly back into the hideous state I've been in all day long. I haven't held on to this hand long enough for it to count as a definite victory.

When Madame Derville repeated her suggestion that they go back inside, Julien tightly pressed the hand that had surrendered to him.

Madame de Rênal had been about to get up, but now she took her seat again, saying in a weak, fading voice:

"I do feel a little ill, but the fresh air is doing me good."

Those words confirmed Julien's happiness, which, at the moment, was extreme; he chatted, forgetting all his artifice, and appearing the most amiable of men to the two friends listening to him. But in the midst of that eloquence a new fear suddenly arose in him. He felt mortal terror at the thought that Madame Derville, uncomfortable with the winds that had been on the rise, heralding a storm to come, might want to go back into the living room by herself. He would then be left all alone with Madame de Rênal. He had managed, just barely, to stir up enough blind courage to perform his great act; but he knew it was entirely beyond his powers to be able to say even the simplest thing to Madame de Rênal. Even if her reproaches were entirely mild, he would sink, defeated, beneath them, and the victory he had won would be annihilated.

But luckily for him, on this evening his moving, emphatic discourse found favor with Madame Derville, who usually found him gauche like a child, and a little amusing. As for Madame de Rênal, her hand in Julien's, she was thinking of nothing; she allowed herself simply to live. The hours they spent under that great lime tree—which, according to local tradition, had been planted by Charles the Bold<sup>56</sup>—had been an epoch of pure happiness for her. She heard with rapture the wind howling above in the lime tree's thick foliage, and the sound of a few heavy, scattered drops just beginning to fall upon its lowest leaves. Julien failed to notice a detail that would have greatly reassured him: Madame de Rênal had been obliged to withdraw her hand as she got up to help her cousin pick up a flowerpot that the wind had blown over at their feet, and when she sat back down, she gave him her hand again with no difficulty, as if all this had long been settled between them.

The clock had long since struck midnight; now they really did have to go in from the garden: the group had to break up. Madame de Rênal was in such bliss at being in love that she scarcely reproached herself at all. Her happiness kept her from sleeping. Julien fell directly into a leaden sleep, exhausted by the internal battles he had been fighting all day between his pride and his timidity.

The next day, he was awakened at five, and, what would have been a cruel blow to Madame de Rênal had she known of it, he scarcely gave her a thought. He had fulfilled *his duty*, a *heroic duty*. The feeling left him filled with happiness; he turned the key to lock the door to his bedroom and surrendered himself with a wholly new pleasure to continue reading about the exploits of his hero.

When the bell for lunch sounded, he had forgotten, having lost himself reading the bulletins of the Grande Armée, all about the victory he had won the night before. As he descended the stairs to the living room, he said to himself, in a casual tone, I need to tell that woman that I love her.

Instead of the impassioned gaze he was expecting to see, he encountered the austere expression on the face of Monsieur de Rênal, who, having just two hours previous arrived from Verrières, made perfectly clear the annoyance he felt at discovering Julien had spent the entire morning apart from the children. There was nothing uglier than this self-important man when he was in a foul mood and believed himself justified in showing it.

Each bitter word from her husband pierced the heart of Madame de Rênal. As for Julien, he had been plunged so deeply in his ecstasy, so focused on the great events that had been unfurling before his eyes for the past several hours, that he could scarcely lower himself to pay attention to the harsh words Monsieur de Rênal was addressing to him. Finally he said, brusquely:

“I wasn’t feeling well.”

The tone of that response would have stung a man far less susceptible than the mayor of Verrières, and he considered firing Julien on the spot. He was only restrained by remembering his maxim, never to make sudden decisions when it comes to business.

This young fool, he said to himself, has managed to get himself a kind of



reputation in my house. Valenod could pluck him away, or he could marry Élisabeth, and in either case he could laugh at me in his heart.

Despite the wisdom of such reflections, Monsieur de Rênal could not keep himself from uttering a number of crude remarks that, bit by bit, began to irritate Julien. Madame de Rênal was on the point of bursting into tears. As soon as the meal was over, she asked Julien to give her his arm for a walk, and she leaned upon it in a friendly way. Everything Madame de Rênal said only elicited Julien's muttered reply:

*"So this is what rich people are like!"*

Monsieur de Rênal was walking close by them, his continued presence adding to Julien's anger, and when he noticed that Madame de Rênal was leaning on his arm in a very marked manner, he found the gesture disgusting, and he pushed her away violently, disengaging his arm.

Fortunately, Monsieur de Rênal did not notice this new impertinence; it was only noticed by Madame Derville. Her friend was now weeping. Just then Monsieur de Rênal began throwing rocks at a little peasant girl who was trespassing on his land by taking the wrong path through a corner of the orchard.

"Monsieur Julien, please, get control of yourself. After all, we all have our bad moods," Madame Derville said rapidly.

Julien looked at her coldly, his eyes expressing the greatest contempt.

That look shocked Madame Derville, and it would have disturbed her even more if she had been able to read its true meaning; she would have read there the vague hope for some hideous revenge. It is no doubt moments of humiliation like these that create men like Robespierre.

"Your Julien is a violent man. He frightens me," Madame Derville said quietly to her friend.

"He's right to be angry," she replied. "After all the progress he's made with the children, why should we care if he wants to spend a morning without them. You must agree that men can be very inflexible."

For the first time in her life, Madame de Rênal felt something like a desire for vengeance on her husband. The extreme hatred of the wealthy that seethed in Julien was about to break out. Fortunately, Monsieur de Rênal called to his

gardener, and the two of them spent the rest of the time using bundles of thorn to plug up the path that led across the orchard. Julien made no response at all to the various thoughtful attentions they paid to him for the rest of the walk. Almost as soon as Monsieur de Rênal left them, the two women, claiming they were fatigued, each took one of his arms.

Walking between those two women, their cheeks red with embarrassment, Julien made a striking contrast with his haughty pallor, his somber, determined air. He despised the women, and all tender feelings.

Yes, he was saying to himself, I won't even be getting a five-hundred-franc stipend to complete my studies. Oh, I'd like to tell him where he could take a nice walk!

Absorbed in such ruthless thoughts, what little he could bother to understand of the courteous things the two friends were saying disgusted him, striking him as meaningless, foolish, weak—in a word, *feminine*.

Talking just for the sake of talking, trying to find a way to keep the conversation alive, it happened that Madame de Rênal mentioned her husband had come back from Verrières because he had made a business deal with one of his farmers to purchase maize straw. (In this region, maize straw is used to stuff mattresses.)

Madame de Rênal continued: "My husband won't be rejoining us. He'll be busy working with the gardener and the valet to put fresh straw in all the mattresses in the house. This morning they did the beds on the first floor, and now they'll move on to the second."

Julien changed color; he gave Madame de Rênal a significant look, and by quickening his pace, he drew her off away from Madame Derville, who slowed her pace for them.

"You must save my life," Julien said to Madame de Rênal, "because you're the only one who can do it. You know that the valet hates me with a passion. I must tell you, Madame, that I have a portrait, and I've hidden it inside my mattress."

The word made Madame de Rênal turn pale herself.

"You're the only one, Madame, who could go into my room right now; feel

around in the mattress without letting anyone see you; in the corner of the mattress nearest to the window, you'll find a little box, made of smooth, black cardboard."

"And there's a portrait inside!" said Madame de Rênal, feeling she barely had the strength to remain standing.

Julien noticed her demoralized air, and he rushed to take advantage of it.

"I have a second favor to ask of you, Madame: I beg you not to look at this portrait. It's my secret."

"It's a secret!" said Madame de Rênal, her voice faint.

Even though she had been brought up among people proud of their money, and interested in little else, love had already distilled some generosity into her soul. Cruelly wounded, she nonetheless questioned Julien, with an air of complete devotion, to learn the few details she would need to do to carry out her commission.

"All right," she said as she began to walk away, "a little round box of black cardboard, very smooth."

"Yes, Madame," said Julien with the kind of severe air a man in danger will take on.

She went up to the second floor of the château, as pale as if she were going to her death. To make her misery even worse, she felt that she might be about to get sick, but knowing the necessity of doing this service for Julien gave her strength.

"I've got to get that box," she said to herself, quickening her pace.

She could hear her husband talking to the valet, and they were actually in Julien's room! But fortunately they moved on to the room where the children slept. She lifted the mattress and thrust her hand inside so forcefully that she scratched her fingers. Though she usually was highly sensitive to little injuries like this, now she didn't even feel it, for at the same instant she got hold of the cardboard box. She snatched it up and disappeared.

As soon as the fear of being discovered by her husband had passed, the horror she felt about what might be in that box seized her, and now she was sure she was about to be sick.

Julien must be in love, and I'm holding the portrait of the woman he loves!

Sitting on a chair in the foyer outside the apartment, Madame de Rênal fell prey to all the horrors of jealousy. Her extreme ignorance was again useful to her in such a moment, for astonishment tempered her grief. Julien appeared; he seized the box, without thanking her, without saying so much as a word, and he rushed into his room where he lit a fire and burned it immediately. He was pale and worn out, having exaggerated the risk he had been running.

He hung his head and thought, a portrait of Napoleon discovered in the room of a man who makes a constant profession of his hatred for the usurper! And discovered by Monsieur de Rênal, such an Ultra, and in such a foul mood! And to make my imprudence even worse, the lines I'd written, in my own hand, on the white card on the back of the portrait! There'd be no doubt about how extreme my admiration was! And I dated them all, all those ecstatic declarations of my devotion! There was one from just the day before yesterday!

My reputation would be in ruins, completely wiped out in one moment! Julien continued, watching the little box burning. My reputation is my only possession, it's all I have, all I have to live on . . . but what a life, good God!

An hour later, his exhaustion and his self-pity combined to make him affectionate. He returned to Madame de Rênal, and, taking her hand, he kissed it with more sincerity than he had ever felt. She blushed with happiness, and then, almost simultaneously, she pushed him away in the anger of jealousy. Julien's pride, so recently having been wounded, now impelled him to act like a fool. Seeing nothing in Madame de Rênal but a wealthy woman, he let her hand drop and walked away. He went off into the garden to think, and soon a bitter smile appeared on his lips.

Here I am walking around calmly, as if I were master of my own time! I'm not busy with the children! I'm exposing myself to more humiliating chastisement from Monsieur de Rênal, and he'll have reason for it! He rushed up into the children's room.

Caresses from the youngest, whom he liked very much, helped take the sting out of his sorrow.

This one doesn't despise me yet, Julien thought. But then he reproached himself for letting his unhappiness diminish, as if doing so were a kind of weakness in him. These children caress me the same way they'd caress the new hunting dog that was bought yesterday.

10

**BIG HEART,  
SMALL FORTUNE**

*But passion most dissembles, yet betrays,  
Even by its darkness; as the blackest sky  
Foretells the heaviest tempest.*

**DON JUAN, CANTO I, STANZA 73**

Monsieur de Rênal, making the rounds of every room in the house, returned to the children's room with the servants who were bringing the restuffed mattresses back. That man's sudden appearance was the last straw for Julien.

Even paler and more somber than usual, Julien strode up to him. Monsieur de Rênal stopped and looked at his servants.

"Monsieur," Julien said, "do you think your children would have made as much progress with any other tutor as they have with me? And if not," Julien continued without allowing him time to answer, "how dare you tell me I'm neglecting them?"

Monsieur de Rênal, overcoming the fear he at first felt, concluded, from the tone this little peasant was taking with him, that he had had a better offer from someone else and that he was about to quit. The longer Julien talked, the angrier he became.

“I can make a living without you, Monsieur,” he added.

“It pains me to see you so upset,” Monsieur de Rênal replied, stammering a little. The servants were ten feet away, working on the beds.

“That’s not enough for me, Monsieur,” Julien said, beside himself with anger. “Think about the insults you gave me, and in front of the ladies as well!”

Monsieur de Rênal now understood only too well what Julien was asking for, and a painful battle took place within his heart. And now, Julien, practically insane with rage, exclaimed:

“I know where I can go, Monsieur, when I leave you!”

Monsieur de Rênal immediately visualized Julien working for Monsieur Valenod.

“Well, Monsieur!” he said with a sigh, sounding as if he were calling in a surgeon to perform the grimmest operation on him, “I accept your request. Starting the day after tomorrow, which will be the first of the month, I’ll give you fifty francs a month.”

Julien felt like bursting out laughing, and he stood there stupefied. All his rage drained away.

I didn’t have enough contempt for this animal! he thought. I suppose that’s the greatest apology you can get from a creature that base.

The children, who had been listening to this scene open-mouthed, ran out into the garden to tell their mother that Monsieur Julien had been really mad, but that now he was going to be making fifty francs a month.

From force of habit, Julien followed them out without so much as looking at Monsieur de Rênal, who remained there, deeply irritated.

There’s another hundred and sixty-eight francs, the mayor said to himself, that Valenod has cost me. I really need to have a few firm words with him about his contract for supplies for the foundlings.

A moment later, Julien was standing in front of him again.

“I need to see Father Chélan about a matter of conscience. I have the honor of informing you that I’ll be absent for a few hours.”

“Oh, my dear Julien,” Monsieur de Rênal said with a most insincere little

laugh, “take all day if you need to, and tomorrow too, my good friend. Take the gardener’s horse to go to Verrières.”

So he’s off, Monsieur de Rênal said to himself, to give his answer to Valenod. He hasn’t promised me anything, but it’s best to let the young hothead cool off a bit.

Julien made a quick escape, climbing up into the great forest through which one can go from Vergy to Verrières. He by no means wanted to get to Father Chélan quickly. Far from desiring to be forced into a new scene of hypocrisy, he wanted to take some time to gaze inside himself, to see his soul with some clarity, and to work through the great swarm of feelings surging through him.

I’ve won a battle, he said to himself as soon as he found himself in the forest, far from the eyes of anyone else. So—I’ve won a battle!

The phrase cast a glow over his entire situation and restored some peace to his soul.

Here I am with a salary of fifty francs a month: Monsieur de Rênal must have really been afraid. But of what?

Meditating on what it must have been to frighten the prosperous and powerful man an hour ago, and just when he had been most seething with rage against him, gave Julien a deep reassurance. He almost felt something of the beauty of the forest through which he was walking. Enormous pieces of bare rock had fallen, long ago, from the mountain down into the midst of the forest. Great beech trees rose up, nearly as high as the rocks, their shade offering a delightful coolness just a step or two away from places where the heat of the sun would have made it impossible to sit and rest.

Julien took a deep breath in the shadow of one of those great rocks, and then proceeded with his climb. Soon, following a narrow path that was barely visible and used only by the goatherds, he found himself standing atop an immense rock, feeling certain that he was entirely separated from and out of the sight of all men. This physical positioning made him smile, as if it were an emblem of the mental position he ardently hoped to attain. The pure air of these high mountains communicated a serenity, even a joy, to his soul. The mayor of

Verrières remained, in his eyes, the representative example of all the wealthy, insolent creatures on the earth; but Julien also felt that his hatred for the man, violent as it was, had nothing personal in it. If he were to stop seeing Monsieur de Rênal, within a week he'd have forgotten him, his château, his dogs, his children, his entire family. I've forced him somehow, I don't know how, to make the ultimate sacrifice. Really—over fifty écus a year! And just a second before, I was barely getting myself out of a dangerous spot. So that's two victories in one day. I can't take credit for the second one, not until I get it figured out, but tomorrow's soon enough for working on it.

Julien, standing upright on his great rock, looked up at the sky, aflame with the August sun. Cicadas were singing in the field down below the rock, and when they stopped, everywhere was silence. The countryside stretched out before him for some twenty leagues. A hawk took flight from the huge rock outcrops up above him, and Julien caught sight of it making immense circles high up in the sky. His eyes mechanically followed the bird of prey. He was struck by how serene yet powerful its movement was; he envied that power, and he envied that isolation.

It had been the destiny of Napoleon. Would it one day be his?

## 11

# AN EVENING

*Yet Julia's very coldness still was kind,  
And tremulously gentle her small hand  
Withdrew itself from his, but left behind  
A little pressure, thrilling, and so bland  
And slight, so very slight that to the mind,  
'Twas but a doubt.*

**DON JUAN, CANTO I, STANZA 71**



However, it was necessary that he be seen in Verrières. Upon leaving the presbytery, Julien had the good luck of running into Monsieur Valenod, to whom he hastened to tell about his increased salary.

When he returned to Vergy, Julien did not go down to the garden until night had fallen. His spirit was exhausted after being agitated all the long day by a multitude of powerful emotions. What can I say to them? he asked himself with some anxiety when he thought of the two women. He was unable to see that his mental energies were expended on precisely the same level where most women spend their lives, absorbed in petty circumstances. Julien was often unintelligible to Madame Derville and even to her friend, and he, in turn, only comprehended about half of what they were saying to him. Such was the strength or, if I may use the term, the grandeur of the tides of passions seething within this ambitious young man. For this extraordinary creature, every day was a tempest.

When he came into the garden that evening, Julien was inclined to give his full attention to any thoughts the two pretty cousins might express. They awaited him impatiently. He took his usual spot, next to Madame de Rênal. The darkness was almost total. He tried to take hold of a white hand that, for some time, he had seen resting near him on the back of a chair. There was a brief hesitation, and then the hand was withdrawn in a way that suggested ill humor. Julien was disposed to let it go at that, and to continue the conversation cheerfully, when he heard Monsier de Rênal approaching.

Julien still had those crude words of his from the morning ringing in his ears. He said to himself, wouldn't it be a fine way of showing my contempt for that creature by holding his wife's hand, right in front of his eyes? Yes, and I'll do it—after all the contempt he's shown me.

Immediately all his peace of mind—a peace that was so rare in Julien—drained away; now he felt an anxious desire, unable to focus his thinking on anything else, for Madame de Rênal to willingly give him her hand.

Monsieur de Rênal was talking politics with rancor: two or three industrialists in Verrières were becoming decidedly wealthier than he, and they were planning to oppose him in the elections. Madame Derville was listening. Julien

slid his chair closer to Madame de Rênal, the darkness covering all his movement. He was bold enough to place his hand very close to the pretty arm that her dress left exposed. He was agitated, unable to think clearly, and, leaning down so his cheek approached the arm, he dared to kiss it.

Madame de Rênal trembled. Her husband was only a few feet away; hurriedly, she gave Julien her hand, while also pushing him back a little. While Monsieur de Rênal continued his diatribe against people who didn't have a thing to their name and the local Jacobins who were enriching themselves, Julien took the hand that had been tendered to him and covered it with passionate kisses—or at least kisses that seemed that way to Madame de Rênal. And the poor woman had been given proof that very day that the man she adored was in love with someone else! The whole time Julien had been gone, she had been prey to extreme misery, and it had led her to reflect.

Me, in love? she had said to herself. Me, be loved? Me, a married woman, falling in love? But, she continued, I never felt this deep madness for my husband, and it won't let me tear myself away from Julien. And after all, he's only a boy, filled with respect for me! This is madness; it'll pass. Anyway, my feelings for this young man can't possibly be of any concern to my husband. Monsieur de Rênal would be bored with the conversations I have with Julien on topics involving the imagination. He only thinks about business. It's not as if I'm taking something away from him and giving it to Julien.

There was not a trace of hypocrisy sully the purity of this naive soul, blinded by a passion she had never yet felt. She was deceived, but she did not know it; even so, her instinctive virtue had been alarmed. Such were the struggles being waged within her when Julien appeared in the garden. She heard his voice at just the same moment she saw him sitting down beside her. Her soul had become, so to speak, elevated by this enchanting happiness that, for the past two weeks, had been even more surprising than seductive. All of it had been utterly unforeseen. But now, after a moment, she said to herself, so Julien's presence is all it takes to wipe away his wrongs? It frightened her, and this was the moment when she withdrew her hand.

Then those kisses, so passionate, so unlike any kisses she had ever felt, im-

mediately made her forget that he loved another woman. He was no longer guilty in her eyes. The cessation of that acute pain, the daughter of suspicion, and the presence of a happiness unlike anything she'd ever dreamed of sent her into transports of love and of wild gaiety. The evening was a charming one for all of them except the mayor of Verrières, who simply could not forget his wealth-accumulating businessmen. Julien thought no longer of his dark ambition, nor of his difficult schemes. For the first time in his life, he was carried away by beauty's power. Lost in a vague, sweet reverie, so foreign to his character, gently pressing that hand, which seemed to him to be as pretty as anything could be, he half listened to the rustle of the foliage in the lime tree, stirred by the gentle night breeze, and the dogs down in the mill by the Doubs, barking in the distance.

But this feeling was a pleasure, not a passion. Returning to his room, he could think of only one happiness: picking up his favorite book again. At twenty, thinking about the world and the effect you might be able to have on it supersedes everything else.

Soon he set the book back down. By thinking of Napoleon's victories, he had come to a realization about one of his own. Yes, he said to himself, I've won a battle, but I need to get the maximum advantage out of it, and that means crushing the pride of that arrogant gentleman while he's in retreat. That's what Napoleon would do, every time. I'll ask for three days off to go visit my friend Fouqué. If he refuses, I'll tell him again what he stands to lose—but he'll give in.

Madame de Rênal could not even close her eyes. She felt she had never really been alive until this moment. She could think of nothing but the great happiness of feeling Julien cover her hand with those burning kisses.

Suddenly an ugly word sprang up in her mind: adultery. And with it came all that the foulest debauchery can do to sully the idea of a sensual love, a throng of images rushing in and taking over her imagination. Those images tried to tarnish the tender, divine image of Julien and of a happy future that she had been creating. Now the future appeared before her in hideous colors. She saw herself as contemptible.

The moment was horrifying; her soul had suddenly traveled to unknown realms. The preceding evening she had been tasting an entirely new happiness, but now she felt herself plunged into a ghastly misery. She had had no idea that such suffering existed; it unsettled her reason. For a moment, she felt like going to her husband and admitting that she feared she was falling in love with Julien. It would have given her the chance to speak about him. But then, fortunately, she recalled a precept her aunt had given her once, just before her wedding. It concerned how dangerous it was to make certain confidences to one's husband, who, after all, was in the position of being one's master. In her overwhelming sorrow, she wrung her hands.

Her spirit was tossed this way and that by contradictory images and griefs. While at one moment she feared not being loved, at the next she was tormented by the ugly thought of the crime, as if she were about to be locked in the pillory the next day, in the public square in Verrières, wearing a placard telling the whole world she was an adulteress.

Madame de Rênal had had no experience of life. Even when wide awake and in full control of all her reasoning powers, she would have seen no distinction between being guilty in the eyes of God and finding herself exposed to the populace with all the most extreme marks of universal contempt.

When, at length, she was given a respite from the horrible thought of adultery and all the ignominy that, in her thinking, the crime brings with it, and she began to fantasize about a sweet, innocent life together with Julien, as in their recent past, then came the terrible thought that Julien loved another woman. She saw again how he went pale when he feared losing his portrait or being compromised when it was discovered. For the first time, she had observed fear on that face, so serene, so noble. He had never seemed so moved by her or by the children. And this new, added grief flooded over her, plunging her into the most intense anguish the human soul can endure. Without realizing it, Madame de Rênal cried out, waking her chambermaid. Suddenly she saw a lamp approaching her bedside, and she recognized Élisabeth.

"Are you the one he loves?" she called out in her madness.

The chambermaid was so startled at the horrible suffering her mistress

seemed to be undergoing that she, fortunately, paid no attention to the question. Madame de Rênal did quickly sense her own imprudence: “I have a fever,” she said, “and I think I might be a little delirious. Stay here with me.” Fully awakened now by the need to keep herself under control, she found that she felt less miserable; reason took back the throne from which her half sleep had unseated it. To evade her chambermaid’s continued staring at her, she ordered her to read the paper to her, and as the monotonous voice of the girl droned on reading a long article from the *Quotidienne*, Madame de Rênal made a virtuous resolution: she would treat Julien with perfect coldness when she saw him next.

## 12

# A JOURNEY

*In Paris you find elegant people, but in the  
provinces you may find people of character.*

SIEYÈS<sup>57</sup>

The next morning, around five, before Madame de Rênal was up, Julien had already obtained a three-day leave from her husband. He had not expected to feel what he did—a desire to see her again; he kept thinking of that perfect, pretty hand. He went down to the garden, but Madame de Rênal was slow to appear. If Julien had really been in love, he would have seen her behind the half-closed curtains on the second floor, her forehead leaning against the glass. She was looking at him. Finally, despite her resolution, she decided to go down to the garden. Her usual paleness had changed to a most radiant coloring. The naive woman was clearly agitated; a feeling of constraint, even of anger was altering her usual expression of a deep serenity, of being above the vulgar concerns of life, which gave such a charm to that heavenly face of hers.

Julien hurried over to her; he was admiring those lovely arms visible beneath the shawl she had hastily wrapped around her shoulders. The cool of the morning air seemed to bring out the radiance of her complexion, which the struggles of the night had left all the more sensitive to every impression. That beauty, modest and touching, yet suggestive of the kind of mind rarely found among the lower orders, seemed to reveal to Julien an aspect of her soul that he had never suspected. Absorbed in admiration of those charms his avid gaze was discovering, Julien was not thinking about the friendly greeting he might have been expecting, which made him even more surprised by the glacial coldness she showed him; he thought that he could detect, beneath that coldness, an intention of putting him in his place.

The smile of pleasure disappeared from his lips; he remembered the rank he held in society, and above all how he would appear in the eyes of a noble, rich heiress. Immediately his face changed to an expression of pride, along with anger at himself. He thought bitterly of how he had delayed his departure for an hour only to receive this kind of humiliating reception.

Only a fool, he said to himself, gets angry with other people. Stones fall because they're heavy. Will I ever stop being a child? When will I finally keep my heart and soul to myself, and only give people like this nothing more than what they've paid for? If I want their respect, and my own, I have to show them that in my poverty I depend on their wealth, but that my heart is a thousand leagues distant from their insolence, up in a sphere so high it can't even discern their little marks of disdain or favor.

While such thoughts came thronging through the young tutor's mind, the expression on his face changed to one of injured pride and ferocity. Madame de Rênal saw this and was troubled. The virtuous coldness she had wanted to display gave way to an expression of interest, an interest animated by her surprise at seeing this sudden transformation. The empty words people use when they greet each other in the morning—asking about each other's health, remarking on the beauty of the day—dried up for both of them at once. Julien, whose thinking was not disturbed by any passion, quickly saw a way to show Madame de Rênal how little he considered himself her friend; he said nothing about the trip he was about to take, but simply bowed to her and left.

As she watched him go, stunned by the somber aloofness she now saw in that face, so amiable the day before, her oldest boy came running up from the rear of the garden, embracing his mother and saying:

“No lessons today. Monsieur Julien is going on a trip.”

Hearing this, Madame de Rênal felt a mortal chill; her virtue made her miserable, and her weakness made her even worse.

This new turn of events now took full possession of her imagination; she was carried far away from the consolation of all the wise resolutions she had formed during the terrible night before. Now it wasn't a matter of resisting this lover, but of losing him forever.

But she had to go in to breakfast. To make things worse, Monsieur de Rênal and Madame Derville talked of nothing but Julien's departure. The mayor of Verrières had noticed something strange about the firmness with which he had requested time off.

“The little peasant must have another offer from somebody in his pocket. But that somebody, even if it's Monsieur Valenod, is going to be at least a little discouraged when he hears the sum of six hundred francs, which it's going to cost him every year. Yesterday, when he was in Verrières, he must have asked for a few days to think over the offer; and this morning, so as to evade giving me an answer, our little gentleman heads off to the mountains. Look what we've been reduced to: having to negotiate with a wretched employee who decides to play insolent!”

Since my husband, who has no idea how deeply he hurt Julien, thinks he's going to leave us, what should I believe? Oh, it's all been decided! Madame de Rênal thought.

In order to go off and weep freely without having to answer any questions from Madame Derville, she claimed to have a terrible headache and went up to her bed.

“Just like a woman!” Monsieur de Rênal repeated. “There's always something out of whack with their machinery.” And he got up and left, with a sneer.

While Madame de Rênal was prey to the cruelest effects of the love that chance had visited upon her, Julien was happily making his way through the most beautiful scenery mountains can offer. He had to pass over the high ridge

to the north of Vergy. The path he followed, rising up gradually among great beech forests, made infinite zigzags across the steep side of the mountain that forms the north end of the Doubs valley. Soon the traveler's eye could sweep over the lower slopes that mark the course of the Doubs to the south and could see all the way to the fertile plains of Burgundy and Beaujolais. Insensible as the ambitious young man was to this sort of beauty, he could not help stopping from time to time to gaze out over so vast and impressive a spectacle.

Eventually he arrived at the summit of the great mountain, which one has to pass in order to arrive, by a traverse route, at the valley where Julien's young friend, the timber merchant Fouqué, lived. Julien was in no hurry to see him, or any other human being for that matter. Concealed among the bare rocks at the top of the mountain like a bird of prey, he could see from far away anybody approaching. He noticed a small cave in the almost perpendicular rock face. He set off for it and soon was settled in this retreat. Here, he said, his eyes shining with joy, no man can do me any harm. He had an idea: why not write down what he was thinking? That activity was usually so dangerous for him. A flat rock served as his desk. His pen flew across the page: he saw nothing of all that surrounded him. At length, he noticed that the sun was setting behind the mountains of Beaujolais, off in the distance.

Why don't I spend the night here? he asked himself. I have some bread, and *I am free!* At the sound of that great word, his soul was exalted; because of his hypocrisy, he wouldn't feel free even at Fouqué's. His head resting in his hands, Julien sat in the cave, happier than he had ever been in his life, agitated by his reveries and by the bliss of freedom. He watched but scarcely saw the last rays of the evening sun over the mountain. Amid that immense darkness, his mind wandered off to thoughts of what he would encounter one day in Paris. First was a woman, more beautiful, more elevated in mind than any he had ever seen in the province. He loved her passionately, and he was loved in return. If he left her even for a moment, it was only to go cover himself in glory, and earn the reward of being loved even more.

A different young man, one raised among all the sad truths of society life in Paris, even if he had the imagination of Julien, would have been awakened, at



this stage in his fantasy, by the cold hand of irony; great acts would have vanished, along with the hope of performing them, to make room for the well-known maxim: if you leave your mistress, alas, you risk being betrayed two or three times every day.<sup>58</sup> But as the young peasant saw it, the only obstacle between him and the most heroic acts was the lack of opportunity.

A deepening, dark night had replaced the day, and he still had two leagues to cover before making his way down into the hamlet where Fouqué lived. Before leaving his little cave, Julien lit a fire and carefully burned everything he had written.

He greatly surprised his friend when he knocked on his door at one in the morning. He found Fouqué busy working on his accounts. He was a tall young man, not very attractive to look at, with oversized, harsh features and an enormous nose, but there was endless good nature concealed under that repulsive exterior.

“What’s happened? Have you quarreled with your Monsieur de Rênal that you turn up out of the blue like this?”

Julien recounted the events of the previous day, though including only the necessary details.

“Stay here with me,” Fouqué said to him. “It’s pretty clear that you’ve gotten to know that Monsieur de Rênal, Monsieur Valenod, Maugiron the subprefect, and the priest Chélan. You’ve observed the subtleties in their characters, and that puts you in a good position to go to the auctions. You’re better at arithmetic than I am, so you could do my accounts. My business is making good money. But I can’t handle it all alone, and I’m afraid of taking on a partner who turns out to be a crook, so I end up having to turn down some really good deals. Just a month ago I made Michaud, from Saint-Armand, six thousand francs richer. I hadn’t seen him in six years, and I ran into him just by chance at the Pontarlier sale. Why shouldn’t you have pocketed that six thousand, or at least three? Because if you’d been with me on that day, I would have bid for that lot of timber, and everybody else would have let me get it. Be my partner.”

This proposal put Julien in a bad mood because it got in the way of the wild train of thought he had been indulging. All during their meal—which the two

prepared together, like a pair of heroes in Homer, because Fouqué lived alone—he kept showing his account books to Julien, trying to prove to him how profitable the timber trade could be. Fouqué had the highest opinion of Julien's intelligence and character.

When the latter was finally alone in his little room of pine board, he said to himself: True, I could make a few thousand francs here, which would put me in better shape for moving on and becoming either a soldier or a priest, depending on which is more powerful in France at the time. The little savings I would have accumulated would take care of any details and difficulties. Living alone here on this mountain would give me time to remove some of my gross ignorance concerning the things gentlemen talk about. But Fouqué has turned his back on the idea of marrying, and he keeps saying how much he hates solitude. It's clear that if he takes on a partner who has no funds to invest in the business, it's in the hope of finding a companion who'll never leave him.

And should I deceive my friend? Julien exclaimed angrily to himself. This creature, for whom hypocrisy and the total absence of sympathy were his constant resources, suddenly could not bear the idea of being even slightly in the wrong with a man who loved him as a friend.

Suddenly Julien's mood brightened, as he hit upon an excuse for refusing the offer. But look, I'd be losing seven or eight years. By that age, Napoleon had already accomplished his greatest feats! After I'd earned some money here in obscurity, running around to timber auctions and gaining the respect of a few subaltern nobodies, could I be sure that I'd still have the sacred fire that's needed to become somebody?

The next morning, Julien gave his response with perfect composure to the decent Fouqué, who had thought the whole business was settled, explaining that he had a calling to the holy ministry of the altar, and he simply could not accept the proposal. Fouqué had never dreamed of hearing such a thing.

"But do you understand that I'm offering to make you my partner, or, if you'd rather, that I'm willing to just give you four thousand a year? And instead you're going to return to the house of that Monsieur de Rênal, who respects you about as much as the mud on his shoes! When you've piled up a couple of hundred

louis, what's to prevent you from going into the seminary then? And I'll make it better yet: I'll take it upon myself to be sure you get the best parish out there. Because," here Fouqué lowered his voice, "I furnish the firewood for Monsieur \*\*\* and Monsieur \*\*\*. I always give them the best kind of oak, but I only charge them for birch, which happens to be the best investment I ever made."

Nothing could prevail against Julien's vocation, however, and Fouqué began to think his friend might be a little insane. On the third day, at first light, Julien left his friend to go spend the day up among the crags on the great mountain. He found his little cave again, but this time there was no peace in his heart, for his friend's proposals had stolen it away from him. Like Hercules, he found himself torn, not between vice and virtue, but between the mediocrity of a comfortable life and the heroic dreams of his youth. Clearly, I don't have enough strength of character, he said to himself, and such doubts caused him the greatest distress. I'm not made of wood the way great men are, because I'm afraid that spending eight years earning my bread might rob me of the sublime energy that's necessary for accomplishing great deeds.

## 13

# OPENWORK STOCKINGS

*A novel: it's a mirror you hold up to the roadway.*

SAINT-RÉAL<sup>59</sup>

When Julien caught sight of the picturesque ruins of the old Vergy church, he realized that he had not thought of Madame de Rênal even once for the past two days. When I left the other day, that woman reminded me of the infinite distance separating us; she treated me like the son of a workingman. Probably

she wanted to emphasize her repentance for letting me hold her hand the night before . . . Still, that hand is awfully pretty! And the charm—the nobility in the woman’s expression!

The possibility of making his fortune with Fouqué relaxed Julien’s thinking a little; it was not as easily irritated, not as embittered by the vivid awareness of his poverty and his lack of position in the world. As if he had been placed up on a high promontory, he felt able to look down on and, so to speak, take control of both extreme poverty and the material comfort he still called wealth. He was far from judging his position philosophically, but he had enough mental clarity to sense that he was now somehow *different* after the short trip up the mountain.

He was struck by how very troubled Madame de Rênal seemed when he told her the little tale of his journey, which she had asked for.

Fouqué had had marriage plans, unhappy love affairs; lengthy confidences on such matters had filled the conversation between the two friends. After achieving happiness too soon, Fouqué realized he was not the only one she loved. Such stories surprised Julien; he was learning a great deal. His solitary life, composed of imagination and resentment, had kept him distant from experiences that might have enlightened him.

During his absence, life for Madame de Rênal had been a series of tortures—each different, but all intolerable; she had really fallen ill.

“Above all,” Madame Derville said to her when she saw that Julien had returned, “as sick as you are, you mustn’t go out into the garden this evening. The damp air will only make things worse.”

Madame Derville was surprised to see that her friend, who was always being scolded by Monsieur de Rênal for the excessive plainness of her clothing, had just put on some openwork stockings and some pretty little shoes that had arrived from Paris. For three days now, Madame de Rênal’s sole distraction was cutting out and having Élisabeth put together a summer dress of a pretty fabric that was the height of fashion. The dress was just being finished when Julien returned; Madame de Rênal put it on at once. Her friend had no more doubts.

She's in love, the poor thing! Madame Derville said to herself. She recognized all the symptoms.

She watched her talking with Julien. The deepest blushes were followed by pallor. Anxiety was evident in those eyes fixed on those of the young tutor. Madame de Rênal expected that at any moment he would explain himself and say either that he was leaving the house or that he was going to stay. It never occurred to Julien to say anything on the subject; he wasn't thinking about it at all. After a painful inner struggle, Madame de Rênal finally made bold to say to him, her voice trembling with evident feeling:

"Are you going to leave your pupils and take a post somewhere else?"

Julien was struck by Madame de Rênal's tremulous voice and the expression on her face. The woman's in love with me, he said to himself, but after this passing moment of weakness, and once she's sure I'll be staying on, her pride will reassert itself. This perception came to Julien like a flash; he hesitated, then replied:

"It would be painful to leave such pleasant children, and *so well born* too, but it might be necessary. After all, one has a duty to oneself."

Uttering that phrase, "so well born" (which was one of the aristocratic expressions Julien had been learning of late), aroused in Julien a profound feeling of antipathy.<sup>60</sup>

In the eyes of this woman, he thought, I am not well born.

Madame de Rênal listened to him, admiring his intellect, his beauty, her heart pierced at the idea of his leaving, a possibility he allowed her to entertain. All her friends from Verrières who had come out to dinner during Julien's absence complimented her, with envy, on the wonderful young man her husband had been so lucky to unearth. This had nothing to do with any progress the children might have been making. The story of his knowing the Bible by heart, and in Latin too, had struck the Verrières citizens into an astonishment that might last a century.

Julien, speaking with no one, heard nothing of all that. If Madame de Rênal could have managed even the least composure, she might have complimented

him on his reputation, and Julien, his pride caressed, would have been gentle and sweet with her, all the more because her new dress struck him as charming. Madame de Rênal, pleased also with the dress, and with what Julien said to her about it, was inclined to take a stroll in the garden; but soon she declared she wasn't feeling strong enough for a walk. She had taken the arm of the traveler, and the contact, far from making her feel supported, took away what strength she had left.

Night came; as soon as they were seated, Julien, asserting his previous privilege, boldly pressed his lips to the arm of his pretty neighbor, and took her hand. He was thinking about how bold Fouqué had been with his mistresses, not about Madame de Rênal; that phrase, *well born*, continued to rankle in his heart. His hand was pressed in return, but it gave him no pleasure. Far from feeling proud or even grateful for the feelings that Madame de Rênal was clearly expressing to him on this night, he was almost entirely insensible to the beauty, the elegance, the freshness of the scene. Purity of soul and the absence of any feelings of hatred combine, no doubt, to prolong the duration of youth. With the majority of pretty women, it's the face that first shows signs of age.

Julien was brooding all evening; until now, his anger had been directed at fate and at society. But now that Fouqué had offered him an unheroic way of achieving a comfortable life, he was in ill humor with himself. He was so wrapped up in his thoughts that, although he occasionally made a remark or two to the ladies, he unconsciously let go of Madame de Rênal's hand. This overwhelmed the poor woman; she saw in the action an emblem of her fate.

If she had been certain of Julien's feeling for her, her virtue might have given her the strength to resist him. But trembling at the thought of losing him forever, her passion so overcame her that she reached out and took Julien's hand, which he, in his distraction, had rested on the back of the chair. This act awakened the ambitious young man; he wished it could have been seen by all those so-proud nobles who smiled down the table at him so condescendingly when he sat there with the children. This woman can't view me with contempt any longer, he thought. I ought to be moved by her beauty. I owe it to myself

to become her lover. The idea would never have occurred to him if it hadn't been for the stories his friend had innocently confided to him.

Making this sudden resolution was a pleasing distraction for him. He thought, I have to have one of these women, and he realized that he would much rather it be Madame Derville—not that she was more attractive, but she had always seen him only as the tutor, honored for his learning, not a working-class carpenter with a wool jacket folded under his arm, the way he had first appeared to Madame de Rênal.

Yet it was exactly as a young workingman, blushing right up to the whites of his eyes, standing at the gate, too timid to ring the bell, that she liked to picture him, when he was most charming in her eyes.

Surveying his situation, Julien saw that there was no point in trying to conquer Madame Derville, who had no doubt already noticed the attraction Madame de Rênal felt for him. Forced to target the latter, he asked himself, what do I know about the character of this woman? Only this: before my trip, I took her hand, and she withdrew it. Today I withdraw my hand, and she takes it and presses it. This gives me a good chance to repay all the contempt she's shown me. God knows how many lovers she's had! She might have decided in my favor just because circumstances make it easy.

Such, alas, is the disadvantage of too much civilization! At twenty, the heart of an educated young man is a thousand leagues away from that carefree attitude, without which love becomes only the most tedious of duties.

And I owe it to myself even more, Julien's vanity was saying to him, to succeed with this woman so that, if I do manage to make my fortune someday and someone thinks to reproach me with having once been a mere tutor, I can claim that I was drawn into the position by love.

Julien removed his hand from Madame de Rênal's, then took it again and pressed it. Toward midnight, they left the garden, and as they entered the living room, Madame de Rênal said to him, very softly:

“So then—are you leaving us?”

Julien replied with a sigh:

“Yes, I really must leave, because I love you so madly that it's a sin . . . and

what a sin, for a priest!” Madame de Rênal leaned on his arm and moved so close to him that her cheek felt the warmth of his.

Those two people went on to spend very different kinds of a night. Madame de Rênal was exalted, lifted up to heights of ecstatic imagination. A young coquette who falls in love quickly acclimates to love’s turmoil; when she reaches the age of true passion, the charm of novelty is gone. Because Madame de Rênal had not read novels, all the nuances of her feelings were new to her. No sad truth intruded to freeze up her feelings, not even the specter of what the future might bring. She imagined herself being just as happy in ten years as she was right then. Even thoughts of virtue, and of the fidelity she had pledged to Monsieur de Rênal, presented themselves to her in vain; she brushed them away like some unwanted guests. I’ll never yield anything to Julien, Madame de Rênal told herself. We’ll live in the future the same way we’ve been living for the last month. He’ll be a friend.

## 14

# A PAIR OF ENGLISH SCISSORS

*A sixteen-year-old girl had the complexion of a rose, and she put on rouge.*

POLIDORI<sup>61</sup>

For Julien, Fouqué’s proposal had truly shattered all his happiness; he felt utterly unable to make any kind of firm decision about his course of action.

I suppose I must be lacking in character. I would have been a bad soldier for Napoleon. But at least, he said to himself, this intrigue with the lady of the house will be a distraction for me.

Fortunately for him, even in a minor incident such as this, his cavalier lan-



guage did not match what was in his heart. He was afraid of Madame de Rênal because of that pretty dress of hers. In his eyes, that dress represented the height of Parisian fashion. His pride made him determined to leave nothing to chance, or to the inspiration of the moment. After Fouqué's confidences and the little he had read about love in his Bible, he set about crafting a highly detailed campaign plan. He wouldn't admit it to himself, but he was very anxious, so he wrote out his plan.

The next morning in the living room, Madame de Rênal was alone with him for a moment.

"Don't you have any other name besides Julien?" she asked.

At so flattering a question, our hero didn't know what to say. This circumstance had not appeared in the plan. If it hadn't been for that asinine plan, Julien's quick wit would have come to his aid and served him well; his surprise would actually have helped produce a clever reply.

He was awkward, and he made his awkwardness even worse. Madame de Rênal readily pardoned him for that. To her, it was the mark of a charming candor. And the one thing she found missing in this brilliant young man was an air of candor.

"I can't trust your little tutor at all," Madame Derville said more than once. "He's always calculating, and he never does anything spontaneously. He's devious."

Julien remained deeply humiliated by the misfortune of not knowing how to reply to Madame de Rênal.

A man like me has to find a way to make up for that slip; and, seizing the moment when she was passing from one room to another, he thought it was his duty to kiss Madame de Rênal.

Nothing could have been worse planned, less agreeable, and, both for him and for her, more imprudent. They were very nearly seen. Madame de Rênal thought he must be mad. She was frightened and deeply shocked. Such boorish behavior reminded her of Monsieur Valenod.

What would happen to me, she asked herself, if I were alone with him? At that, all her virtue came rushing back to her, eclipsing her love.

She arranged things so that in the future one of her children would always be with her.

The day was tedious for Julien, for he spent it awkwardly, trying to put his seduction plan into execution. He never exchanged a look with Madame de Rênal without his face expressing some meaning; however, he was not stupid enough to fail to see that he was being not only unpleasant but the opposite of seductive.

Madame de Rênal remained shocked at finding him both so awkward and so bold. It must be the shyness that an intellectual man like him feels when he's in love! she finally decided, feeling pleased with this formulation. Could it be possible that my rival has never really loved him?

After luncheon, Madame de Rênal went back into the living room to receive a visit from Monsieur Charcot de Maugiron, the subprefect of Bray. She was working on a little tapestry frame on a tall stand. Madame Derville was beside her. And this was the setting, in the broadest of broad daylight, in which our hero thought it wisest to advance his foot so as to press the pretty little foot of Madame de Rênal, whose openwork stockings and chic Parisian shoes were evidently attracting the gaze of the gallant subprefect.

Madame de Rênal was stunned with fear; at once she let fall her scissors, her ball of wool, and her needles, so that Julien's movement might be interpreted as an awkward attempt to halt the fall of the scissors, which he had seen beginning to slip. Fortunately, these little scissors of English steel broke apart, and Madame de Rênal vigorously expressed her regret that Julien had not been positioned closer to her. "You saw them falling before I did, and you could have caught them. Instead, your zeal has only managed to give me a swift kick in the shin." This whole show fooled the subprefect, but not Madame Derville. Our pretty boy has some crude manners! she thought. The mores of a provincial capital allow for no forgiveness for slips like this. Madame de Rênal found the opportunity to say to Julien:

"Be careful. I'm ordering you!"

Julien realized how gauche he had been, and he slipped into irritability. He

debated inwardly at length whether he ought to be offended by that sentence: *I'm ordering you!* He was fool enough to think, she could say "I order you" when it was a matter to do with the children's education, but when it's a matter of responding to my love, we should be on a level of equality. You can't love without *equality* . . . And now his thoughts wandered off to composing commonplaces about equality. He angrily repeated to himself the line from Corneille that Madame Derville had taught him a few days earlier:

. . . Love

Creates equalities, but does not seek them.<sup>62</sup>

Julien stubbornly insisted on playing the Don Juan role, he who never in his life had had a mistress, and he was as dull as death all day long. He had only one sound idea. Bored with himself and with Madame de Rênal, he dreaded the coming of the evening when he would be sitting next to her in the dark garden, so he told Monsieur de Rênal that he would be going into Verrières to see the priest; he left right after dinner, and only returned late at night.

In Verrières, Julien found Father Chélan in the process of moving; he had lost his position at last and was to be replaced by the vicar Maslon. Julien helped the good old man, and he had the idea of writing to Fouqué that he had at first failed to see the value in his friend's offer because he had been blinded by the attraction of the sacred ministry, but he had now witnessed such an act of injustice that perhaps it might be better for his own salvation not to enter into Holy Orders.

Julien applauded himself for being adroit enough to have made use of the priest's dismissal to leave a door open, so that he could fall back on becoming a merchant if a dreary prudence should end up prevailing in his heart and turning him away from heroism.

## THE CROWING OF THE COCK

Love (*l'amour*) in Latin is *amor*, and from *amor* we get death (*la mort*), and before death come fears that gnaw (*mord*), grief, tears, forfeits, and remorse (*remords*).

If Julien had had even a little of that cleverness that he believed he naturally possessed, he would have congratulated himself the next day when he saw the effect his visit to Verrières had produced. His absence had wiped out the memory of his clumsy advances. But that day, too, he was largely sullen until, when evening came, he had a ridiculous idea, and he communicated it to Madame de Rênal with an unusual fearlessness.

They were scarcely seated in the garden when, without even waiting for the night to become sufficiently dark, Julien put his lips to Madame de Rênal's ear, at the risk of compromising her horribly, and said:

"Madame, I'll come to your room at two o'clock tonight. I have something to tell you."

Julien was trembling in fear that she would agree to it; playing the role of the seducer weighed so heavily on him that if he could have had his real wish, he would have retired to his own room for several days and would never have seen these women again. He understood that his brilliant behavior on the day before had ruined all the fine promise of the day before that, and now he didn't, as the saying goes, know which saint he ought to be praying to.

Madame de Rênal responded with a genuine indignation, one that was in

no way exaggerated, to the impertinence Julien had just announced to her. He thought he could read contempt in her curt response. One phrase that certainly did make an appearance in the course of that response was "How dare you." Saying that he had something to tell the children, Julien went into their room, and when he returned he seated himself next to Madame Derville, as far as he could from Madame de Rênal. This removed any opportunity for him to take her hand. The conversation topic was a serious one, and Julien spoke well, despite a few moments of silence, in which he racked his brains: why can't I think of some clever maneuver, he asked himself, to force Madame de Rênal to show me some of those clear-cut signs of affection that convinced me, just a few days ago, that she was mine?

Julien was extremely taken aback by the near-desperate straits he'd put himself into. And yet, nothing would have made matters worse for him than success.

When midnight came and the group broke up, his pessimism had him believing that Madame Derville despised him and that, probably, he didn't fare much better in Madame de Rênal's estimation.

In a wretched mood, feeling utterly humiliated, Julien could not sleep. He was a thousand miles away from the thought of giving up all his ambitions, all his grand plans, and simply living from day to day with Madame de Rênal, contenting himself like a child with the pleasures each new day would bring.

He exhausted his brain inventing one brilliant tactic after another, then dismissing each idea as absurd; he was, in a word, miserable when the château's clock struck two.

The sound shook him awake the way the crowing of the cock shook Saint Peter. The frightful moment of truth had come. He had forgotten about his impertinent proposition almost as soon as he had spoken it, it was so ill received.

I said I'd go to her room at two o'clock, he said to himself, rising out of his bed. I may be inexperienced and as awkward as the son of a peasant inevitably must be. Madame Derville made that clear enough to me. But at least I won't be weak!

Julien was right to applaud his courage, for never before had he faced so demanding a task. When he opened his door, he was shaking so much his legs almost gave out beneath him, and he had to lean against the wall for support.

He wore no slippers. He went to Monsieur de Rênal's door to listen, and he could hear him snoring inside. He felt devastated. Now there was no excuse for failing to go to her room. But good God, what was he going to do when he got there? He had no plan, and even if he had had one, he was in such a distraught state that he wouldn't have been able to carry it out.

Finally, suffering inwardly as if he were marching off to his death, he entered the little corridor that led to Madame de Rênal's room. With a trembling hand, he opened the door, making a horrible clatter as he did.

A small lamp by the fireplace provided a little light; this was yet another disaster he had not anticipated. On seeing him enter, Madame de Rênal leaped up out of her bed. "You fool!" she exclaimed. There was a moment of confusion. Julien forgot all his foolish plans and reverted to his natural character; failing to please so charming a woman now seemed to him the worst of all possible outcomes. He responded to her reproaches simply by throwing himself at her feet and embracing her knees. She spoke to him with extreme severity, and he burst into tears.

A few hours later, when Julien came out of Madame de Rênal's bedroom, one could say, as the novelists do, that he had nothing more to desire. In fact, he was indebted both to the love he had inspired in her and to the unexpected power her charms exerted upon him for a victory that all his gauche scheming would never have given him.

But even in the sweetest moments, he, victim of a bizarre kind of pride, could not leave off playing the role of a man who was accustomed to seducing women; he made extraordinary efforts to spoil his natural likability. Instead of focusing on the ecstasies he was exciting in her, and on the guilt and remorse that only served to enhance them, he continued to think about what he called his *duty*. He feared the terrible remorse and eternal ridicule that would follow if he were to abandon the ideal he had set up for himself. In short, what made Julien a superior man was exactly the thing that prevented him from being able

to enjoy the happiness that met him on his path. Just like the sixteen-year-old girl with perfect coloring who is mad enough to put on rouge for the ball.

Feeling a mortal terror when she saw Julien appear in her room, Madame de Rênal was immediately subject to the cruelest anxieties. Julien's tears and despair moved her deeply.

And even when there was nothing left to refuse him, she pushed Julien away in a moment of genuine indignation—and then threw herself back into his arms. There was no plan, no purpose in her behavior. She believed she was damned with no possibility of redemption, and she tried to avoid the vision of hell by covering Julien with the most passionate caresses. In other words, our hero would have lacked nothing for his total happiness, not even the burning sensuality of the woman he had just conquered, if only he had been capable of enjoying it. Julien's departure did not end the ecstasies that continued to make her tremble despite herself, and her struggles with her remorse shattered her.

My God! So that's all there is to it, this happiness, this being loved? Such was Julien's first thought when he got back into his room. He was in that condition of astonishment and vague unease that often afflicts the soul when one has just managed to get the thing one has so long desired. The soul had grown accustomed to desiring, now finds nothing left to desire, but has not yet had time for memories to grow and bloom. Like a soldier just back from parade, Julien turned his attention to focus on every detail in his conduct. Did I omit anything I owed myself? Did I play my role well?

And what role? That of a man accustomed to succeeding grandly with women.

## 16

# THE NEXT DAY

*He turned his lip to her, and with his hand  
Called back the tangles of her wandering hair.*

**DON JUAN, CANTO I, STANZA 170**

Fortunately for Julien's reputation, Madame de Rênal had been too agitated, too astonished, to notice the absurdity of the man who, in a single moment, had become everything in the world to her.

While she was trying to get him to go back to his room, seeing the dawn coming, she said aloud, "My God! If my husband heard any sounds, I'm done for." Julien, who had been trying to formulate some rhetoric, came up with this:

"And in that case, would you regret having to leave this life?"

"Oh yes I would, and very much right now! But I wouldn't regret having known you."

Julien felt his dignity demanded that he go back to his room in broad daylight, as imprudently as possible.

The fascinated attention with which he studied even his smallest actions, with the inane idea of passing for a man of experience, did have one benefit; when he next saw Madame de Rênal, his conduct was the very model of prudence.

For her part, she could not even look at him without blushing up to the whites of her eyes—and at the same time, she could not go for even an instant without looking at him. She was aware of the state she was in, but her efforts to conceal it only made it worse. Julien only looked up at her once. At first, Madame de Rênal admired his prudence. But then, seeing him looking in her direction only the one time, she began to become alarmed. Maybe he doesn't love me anymore, she thought. And why would he, when I'm too old for him? I'm ten years older than he is.

As they made their way from the dining room out to the garden, she caught his hand and pressed it. Such an unexpected sign of affection so surprised him that he looked at her with passion in his eyes. At dinner, she had in fact seemed quite pretty to him; and even while keeping his eyes lowered, he had passed the time by enumerating her charms. Now this gaze consoled Madame de Rênal; it by no means removed all her anxieties, but those anxieties did remove all the guilt she might have felt about her husband.

At the luncheon, the husband observed nothing at all, but this was not the case with Madame Derville. She thought she could see Madame de Rênal at the point of succumbing. All day long, her bold, perceptive friend did not spare



her any number of subtle hints designed to paint the danger she was running in the most frightening colors.

Madame de Rênal burned to be alone with Julien; she wanted to ask him if he still loved her. And despite the gentle sweetness of her character, she was several times on the point of telling her friend to stop meddling.

That evening, in the garden, Madame Derville succeeded in arranging things so that she was seated between Madame de Rênal and Julien. Madame de Rênal, who had been imagining the delicious pleasure of holding Julien's hand and of raising it to her lips, now could not even speak directly to him.

This setback only increased her agitation. She was consumed with one special regret: the night before, she had so harshly chastised Julien for coming to her room that she now trembled at the thought that he might not come tonight. She quit the garden early and went up to her room. But, unable to overcome her impatience, she went and pressed her ear against Julien's door. Despite the uncertainty and the passion that churned within her, she dared not enter. That would have seemed to her the most degrading thing she could do, for it even features in a provincial saying.<sup>64</sup>

The domestics were not all in bed yet. Prudence dictated that she get back to her room. The next two hours of waiting were like two centuries of torture.

But Julien was too faithful to what he called his duty to fail in executing, step by step, the entirety of the plan he had laid down for himself.

As one o'clock sounded, he slipped quietly out of his room, made sure the master of the house was sleeping soundly, and made his appearance in Madame de Rênal's bedroom. This time he enjoyed his time with his mistress more, for he thought less constantly of the role he had to play. He had eyes to see with, and ears to hear. What Madame de Rênal said about their ages helped give him greater confidence.

"Oh, I'm ten years older than you! How can you possibly love me?" she repeated with no particular purpose, but simply because the idea was oppressing her.

Julien could not understand what she was feeling, but he could see that it was real, and he forgot nearly all his fear of seeming ridiculous.

The foolish fear of being seen as an inferior kind of lover because of his low birth likewise disappeared. And seeing Julien's rapture reassured his timid mistress, who regained a little happiness of her own, as well as the ability to evaluate her lover. Fortunately, this time he had almost none of that affected air that had made the previous night's meeting a victory but not a pleasure. If she had perceived how much he had been playing a role, that sad revelation would have stolen all her happiness away forever. Instead, all she could see was the unhappy effect of the difference in their ages.

Although Madame de Rênal had never paid any attention to theories of love, a difference in ages is—after that in respective fortunes—one of the great resources of provincial humor whenever the subject turns to love.

In just a few days Julien had regained all the ardor of his youth, and he was now madly in love.

You have to admit, he said to himself, that she has a heart as kind as an angel's, and there's no one prettier.

He had almost completely dropped the idea of playing a role. In one particular moment of abandon, he confessed all his anxieties to her, and that confidence whipped her passion up to new heights: in her delight, she said to herself, so I don't have some happy rival after all! She dared broach the subject of the portrait about which he had been so concerned; Julien swore to her that it was only the portrait of a man.

In the moments when she was calm enough to reflect on it, Madame de Rênal could not get over her astonishment that such happiness really existed, and that she had been so utterly unaware of it.

Ah, she thought, if I had only known Julien ten years ago, then I could have passed for pretty!

Julien was far from such thoughts. His love was still a matter of ambition; it was the joy of possessing—he, a poor, despised, and miserable creature—such a noble and beautiful woman. His little acts of adoration, his delight at the sight of his mistress's charms eventually lessened her fears about the difference in their ages. If she had had a little of that knowledge of life that a woman of thirty has in more civilized regions, she would have trembled at the thought of how

fragile such a love really was, founded solely on the surprise of it all and on the flattering of self-esteem.

In the moments when he forgot about ambition, Julien was almost carried away with the pleasure he felt in gazing at all the accessories, the hats, and the gowns of Madame de Rênal. He could never get tired of breathing in their perfume. He opened her mirrored armoire and spent whole hours admiring the beauty and the arrangement of everything within. His mistress leaned close against him, gazing upon him, while he gazed avidly at the jewelry and finery that might have composed a trousseau, laid out to view on the night before the wedding.

I could have married a man like this! Madame de Rênal sometimes said to herself. What a fiery spirit! What a ravishing life it would have been with him!

As for Julien, never before had he come face to face with these terrible instruments of feminine artillery. It's just not possible, he said to himself, that there's anything finer, even in Paris! And at that thought, he could raise no objection to the happiness he felt. Sometimes the genuine admiration and raptures of his mistress made him forget the useless theorizing that had made him so false and almost ridiculous in the first moments of their liaison. There were even moments when, despite his long habit of hypocrisy, he took pleasure in confessing to this great lady who loved him how ignorant he was of various little ways in which certain things were done. The social rank of his mistress seemed actually to elevate his own. Madame de Rênal, for her part, took a sweet, voluptuous pleasure in instructing this young genius, a man everyone said was destined one day for great success, in a host of little things. Even the subprefect and Monsieur Valenod had to admire him, and that made the two of them seem a little less stupid to her. As for Madame Derville, her sentiments were quite different. Feeling despair at what she believed was going on, and seeing that her wise advice had become odious to a woman who seemed genuinely to have lost her head, she left Vergy without any explanation—and indeed, one was not asked of her. Madame de Rênal at first shed a few tears, but soon her happiness seemed to have doubled, for that departure left her free to be alone with her lover for nearly the whole day.

Julien abandoned himself all the more readily to the sweet company of his mistress because whenever he was alone, Fouqué's fatal proposition returned to haunt and trouble him. In the first days of this new life, he had moments when he—who had never loved anyone, who had never been loved by anyone—found the act of being sincere such a delicious pleasure that he almost confessed to Madame de Rênal the ambition that heretofore had been the whole of his existence. He would have liked to consult her on the strange temptation Fouqué's offer presented to him, but then a minor event took place that banished all his frankness.

## 17

# THE FIRST DEPUTY

*O, how this spring of love resembleth  
The uncertain glory of an April day;  
Which now shows all the beauty of the sun,  
And by and by a cloud takes all away!*

**THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA**<sup>65</sup>

One evening as the sun was setting, Julien was sitting by his mistress at the far end of the orchard; with nothing to bother him, he was deep in reflection. Will sweet moments like this, he asked himself, last forever? His mind and heart were preoccupied with the need to adopt some profession, a great misfortune that must befall the man born without riches, one that brings youth to an end and ruins the first years of manhood.

“Ah!” he exclaimed, “there’s no doubt that Napoleon was sent by God to come to the aid of young Frenchmen! Who will ever replace him? Without him, what will they do, even the wretches better off than I am, the ones who can scrape together enough écus to get themselves a good education, but not

enough to buy their way into a career at twenty! Whatever we end up doing or being,” he concluded with a great sigh, “his fatal memory will always hang over us and never let us be truly happy!”

He caught sight of Madame de Rênal suddenly frowning, and assuming a cold, disdainful air; these were servants’ ways of thinking, she felt. Brought up in the knowledge that she was quite rich, it seemed natural to her to assume that Julien was too. She loved him a thousand times more than life itself, and she gave no thought at all to money.

But Julien was far from being able to read her thoughts. That frown of hers brought him back down to earth. He had enough presence of mind to edit what he had just said so as to make the great lady sitting near him believe that he was quoting the words he had heard from his friend the timber merchant. That was the way the ungodly liked to think.

“Well! Then don’t associate with people like that anymore,” said Madame de Rênal, retaining a little of that glacial air that had abruptly taken the place of her far more tender expression.

That frown, or rather the remorse Julien felt at having been imprudent, was the first pinprick in the bubble of illusion that had been surrounding him. He said to himself, she’s good, and she’s sweet natured, and she has strong feelings for me, but she was brought up in the enemy’s camp. They’re raised to feel a certain fear of the kind of man who’s had a good education but doesn’t have enough money to get into a career. What would happen to all these nobles if we were to fight them with equal weapons? Me, for example: if I were mayor of Verrières, with good intentions and basically honest, the way Monsieur de Rênal is, deep down. Oh, how I’d take care of the vicar, and Monsieur Valenod, and all their little schemes! Oh, then there’d be justice in Verrières! They aren’t clever enough to put anything over on me. They’re just tapping their way along, like blind men.

Julien’s happiness was on the verge, that day, of becoming something lasting. But our hero would never dare to let himself be sincere. He lacked the courage to join in the battle right away, the battle that was right at hand; Madame de Rênal had been shocked by what Julien said, because people in her world

often said that the return of Robespierre was always a possibility, and precisely because of these men from the lower classes who had been too well educated. Madame de Rênal's coolness lasted a long while, and it seemed quite marked to Julien. But it was due more to her fear at having said something disagreeable to him than it was to her repugnance at what he had said. Her troubled mind was reflected all too clearly in her facial expression, which was usually so pure, so candid whenever she was happy and away from tedious people.

Julien could no longer let himself dream with abandon. Calmer now and less amorous, he thought it was imprudent to go to Madame de Rênal in her room. It would be much better for her to come to him. If a domestic were to see her walking through the house, any of a hundred different reasons could account for it.

But this arrangement too had its drawbacks. Julien had got certain books from Fouqué, books he wouldn't have dared order from the bookseller. He only dared open them at night. Often he would have been perfectly content to read them without the interruption of a visit or even the tension of waiting for one, which, even before the little scene in the orchard, would have rendered him incapable of settling down to read.

He was indebted to Madame de Rênal in that he now began to understand his books better than he would have; he had been bold enough to ask her questions on a host of little things, ignorance of which is a serious detriment to the intelligence of a young man not a member of higher society, no matter how much natural genius he might possess.

This education in love, given him by an extremely ignorant woman, was a lucky thing for him. From it, Julien rapidly became able to see society as it really is today. His intellect was not blinded by accounts of how things were two thousand years ago or even sixty, in the times of Voltaire and Louis XV. He felt an inexpressible joy at sensing a veil being removed from his vision; now at last he truly understood the things that were happening in Verrières.

In the foreground he could see the deeply complicated intrigues that had been woven over the preceding two years involving the prefect of Besançon, intrigues that were supported by letters from Paris, written by the most illus-

trious names. It was a matter of getting Monsieur de Moirod, the most pious man in the region, named the first, and not the second, deputy to the mayor of Verrières.

He had a rival, a very wealthy manufacturer, who simply had to be relegated to the post of second deputy.

At last Julien understood the little allusions he had heard when the local high society came to dine at Monsieur de Rênal's home. This privileged group was profoundly concerned with the choice of the first deputy, a question of which the rest of the town, and especially the Liberals, were entirely ignorant. What made it so important was that, as everybody knows, the east side of the main street in Verrières was to be moved back more than nine feet, for the street was now a royal highway.

Now, if Monsieur de Moirod, who happened to own three of the houses that were to be pushed back, did happen to be appointed first assistant to the mayor, and if Monsieur de Rênal were to ascend to the *Chambre des Députés*, he would close his eyes to any improvements made to the houses fronting on the street, any little repairs that would ensure their standing there another hundred years. Despite Monsieur de Moirod's great piety and his well-known integrity, they were all sure he would be "easy to work with," for he had quite a few children. Among the houses slated to be pushed back, nine belonged to the Verrières elite.

In Julien's eyes, this intrigue was far more important than the Battle of Fontenoy, which he had heard of for the first time in one of the books Fouqué had sent him.<sup>66</sup> There had been many things to astonish Julien over the five years since he had begun taking lessons with the priest. But discretion and a humility of intellect are virtues in a student of theology, so asking any questions had always been impossible.

One day, Madame de Rênal was giving an order to her husband's valet—Julien's enemy.

"But Madame, today is the last Friday of the month," the servant said with a strange kind of air.

"Well, go then," said Madame de Rênal.

“You know,” said Julien, “that he’s off to that hay barn that used to be a church, the one where they’ve started having services again. But what does he do there? That’s one mystery I’ve never been able to solve.”

“It’s a useful kind of institution, but it’s an odd enough one too,” replied Madame de Rênal. “Women aren’t admitted, but the one thing I know about it is that everybody addresses each other with the familiar *tu* there. For example, that valet will meet Monsieur Valenod there, and that man, so proud, such a fool, won’t be in the least offended to hear Saint-Jean address him as *tu*, and he’ll reply just the same way. If you really want to know what goes on there, I can ask Monsieur de Maugiron and Monsieur Valenod for some details. We pay twenty francs for each servant, to keep them from slitting our throats someday.”<sup>67</sup>

The time flew by. The memory of his mistress’s charms distracted Julien from his black ambition. The necessity of keeping silent with her about dreary, rational matters—since they belonged to opposing parties—actually added, though he did not realize it, to the happiness he owed to her, and to the power she was beginning to have over him.

During those moments when the presence of sharp-eared little children reduced them to speaking only about matters of cold reason, it was with perfect docility that Julien, gazing at her with eyes afire with love, would listen to her explanations about the world as it was. Often, in the middle of a narrative concerning some clever scheme, something to do with a road’s construction or the supply of some materials, Madame de Rênal’s attention would wander off, leading her into utter incoherence, and at such moments Julien would have to chastise her, after which she would indulge him with the same intimate gestures of affection that she used with her children. And there were days when she drifted into the illusion that she loved him as one of her children. Hadn’t she replied to that endless stream of naive questions on a thousand simple little things that any well-bred child of fifteen already knows? And then a minute later, she would be admiring him as her master. His genius was so powerful that it frightened her; she imagined, every day, that she could see more clearly the future great man in this young cleric. She saw him becoming the pope; she saw



him becoming prime minister, like Richelieu. “Will I live long enough to see you attain your full glory?” she asked Julien. “A place is ready and waiting for a great man. The monarchy and the Church need one.”<sup>68</sup>

18

## A KING COMES TO VERRIÈRES

*What are you good for, just being thrown away like  
the corpse of a people, no blood left in your veins?*

THE BISHOP'S ADDRESS,  
CHAPEL OF SAINT CLÉMENT

On the third of September, at ten o'clock in the evening, a gendarme galloped down the main street of Verrières, waking up everyone, announcing that His Majesty the King of \*\*\* would be arriving on the following Sunday—and this was Tuesday.<sup>69</sup> The prefect authorized—or, rather, ordered—the formation of a guard of honor; maximum pomp was absolutely necessary. A courier was dispatched to Vergy. Monsieur de Rênal returned that night and found the whole town in an uproar. Each had his own ambitions; the least busy among them set to work procuring balconies from which to observe the king's entry.

Who would command the honor guard? Monsieur de Rênal understood at once just how important it was that, in the interests of the houses that were to be pushed back, Monsieur de Moirod play the role of the commander. It could help him be seen as the natural choice for first deputy. No one could in any way criticize the religious devotion of Monsieur de Moirod—it was simply beyond comparison—but the man had never been on horseback. He was thirty-six, a man timid in every respect, equally fearful of falling and of being laughed at.

The Mayor sent for him at five in the morning.

“You see, Monsieur, that I come to seek your advice, as if you already occupied the post that all sensible people hope you’ll eventually occupy. In this miserable town, the manufacturers are getting rich, the Liberals are becoming millionaires, and they’re seeking power, so they’ll be making a weapon out of anything at all. But let’s consider the interests of the king, of the monarchy, and above all, of our holy religion. Who do you think, Monsieur, ought to be given the command of the guard of honor?”

Despite his terrible fear of horses, Monsieur de Moirod ultimately came to accept the honor, like a martyrdom. “I’ll manage to strike the right tone,” he said to the mayor. There was scarcely enough time to clean up the uniforms that had been used seven years before, when a prince of the blood had passed through town.

At seven, Madame de Rênal arrived from Vergy with Julien and the children. She found her drawing room packed with Liberal ladies preaching the union of the two parties and begging her to talk her husband into making room in the honor guard for theirs. One of them claimed that if her husband were not chosen, his grief would drive him to bankruptcy. Madame de Rênal quickly drove everyone out. She seemed deeply preoccupied.

Julien was surprised and then irritated at her keeping whatever was bothering her such a secret. I should have known, he said bitterly to himself, that her love would be overshadowed by the prospect of having a king in her house. All this brouhaha has dazzled her. She will return to her love for me once her brain is no longer distracted by matters of her caste.

The surprising thing? It made him love her more.

The decorators began filling up the house, and he sought in vain for a free moment when he could speak to her. Finally, he caught sight of her coming out of his room, carrying one of his suits. They were alone. He wanted to talk with her. She hurried past, refusing to listen to him. I’m a fool to love a woman like that. Her ambition has turned her as crazy as her husband.

She was in fact nearly mad, for one of her greatest desires was something she dared not avow to Julien for fear of shocking him: she wanted him, for just

one day, to wear something other than his somber suits of black. With genuinely admirable finesse for so artless a woman, she had got first Monsieur de Moirod and then the subprefect, Monsieur de Maugiron, to agree that Julien would join the guard of honor, in preference to five or six young men who were sons of the wealthy manufacturers, two of whom were veritable exemplars of piety. Monsieur Valenod, who was counting on allowing the prettiest women in town the use of his carriage so that his splendid Norman horses would be admired, consented to giving one of the horses to Julien, the creature he hated the most. But all the other guards of honor either owned or had borrowed one of the fine sky-blue suits with two silver colonel's epaulettes, suits that had been so brilliant seven years before. Madame de Rênal wanted a new suit, and she had only four days to send to Besançon and to get from there the uniform, the sword, the helmet, etc., everything necessary for a guard of honor. Amusingly enough, she thought it would be imprudent to have Julien's suit made in Verrières. She wanted to surprise both him and the town.

Once the work of organizing the honor guard and garnering public support was settled, the mayor turned to the subject of the great religious ceremony, for the king of \*\*\* did not want to pass through Verrières without visiting the famous relic of Saint Clément that is conserved at Bray-le-Haut, about a league from the town.<sup>70</sup> It was important for an imposing array of clergy to be present, and this introduced the greatest difficulty of all: Monsieur Maslon, the new curé, was determined to exclude Monsieur Chélan, no matter the cost. In vain, Monsieur de Rênal pleaded with him that this would be highly imprudent. Monsieur the Marquis de La Mole, whose ancestors had long been the governors of the province, had been assigned to accompany the king of \*\*\*. He had known Father Chélan for thirty years. He would undoubtedly ask for news about him as soon as he arrived in Verrières, and if he found that the old priest was in disgrace, he was the kind of man who would seek him out in the little home to which he had retired, accompanied by as many of the whole entourage as he could command. What a slap in the face!

"I would be dishonored both here and in Besançon," Abbé Maslon replied, "if he were to appear among my clergy. Good God, the man's a Jansenist!"<sup>71</sup>

“You can say whatever you like, my dear abbé,” Monsieur de Rênal said, “but I will not expose the Verrières administration to an insult from Monsieur de La Mole. You don’t know him. He’s on the right side of things at Court, but out here in the provinces he tends to have a nasty, satirical, mocking sense of humor, enjoying embarrassing people. He’s fully capable, just to amuse himself, of making us look ridiculous in the eyes of the Liberals.”

Only on Saturday night, after three days of negotiations, did Abbé Maslon’s pride bow before the mayor’s fear, which was turning into its own kind of courage. He had to write a honeyed letter to Abbé Chélan, begging him to come and take part in the ceremony of the relic at Bray-le-Haut, that is, if his great age and infirmities would permit it. Monsieur Chélan asked for, and obtained, a letter inviting Julien, who would accompany him as his subdeacon.

On Sunday morning, thousands of peasants from the neighboring mountains streamed into the streets of Verrières. The day was sunny and bright. Finally, around three o’clock, excitement ran through the whole crowd when they caught sight of a beacon fire up on a high peak, some two leagues from Verrières. This was the signal that the king had just entered the territory of the département. At once all the bells in town began ringing, and the old Spanish cannon belonging to the town was repeatedly set off, expressing the joy everyone felt at this grand event. Half the population were up on the rooftops. All the women were on the balconies. The guard of honor started off. Everyone admired their splendid uniforms, each person recognizing a relative or a friend. They laughed at the evident fear of Monsieur de Moirod whose ever-prudent hand was constantly hovering, ready to grab hold of the pommel of his saddle. But one sight obliterated all the others: the first horseman in the ninth column was an exceptionally handsome boy, quite slender, whose identity at first was uncertain. But soon there were heard cries of indignation among some, while there was silent astonishment among others, marking some universal sensation. They recognized, in that young man riding one of Monsieur Valenod’s Norman horses, little Sorel, the carpenter’s son. People cried out against the mayor, the Liberals especially. What! Just because this little laborer disguised as a priest was tutoring his brats, he had the audacity to name him to the guard

of honor, and in preference to Messieurs so-and-so, the sons of wealthy manufacturers! “Those gentlemen” said a banker’s wife, “really ought to make a point of snubbing that insolent little nobody, born in the gutter.” Her neighbor replied, “But he’s a sly one, and he’s wearing a saber. He’s probably just treacherous enough to slash them across the face for it.”

The comments of the nobility were the most dangerous. The ladies wanted to know if the mayor himself were responsible for this serious impropriety. But most people gave him full credit for paying no attention to the fact of a low birth.

While he was the subject of so many conversations, Julien was the happiest of men. Naturally bold, he sat his horse better than most of the young men in the mountain town. He could see in the women’s eyes that they were talking about him.

His epaulettes were brighter than everyone else’s because they were new. His horse was continually about to rear, which doubled his joy.

His happiness knew no bounds when, passing by the old rampart, the boom from the little cannon made his horse suddenly rear up. By the greatest of good luck, he didn’t fall, and at that moment he felt like a hero. He was an officer under Napoleon, and he was leading the charge against a battery of cannon.

There was one person even happier than he. She had first seen him pass from one of the windows in the town hall; then, getting up into her carriage, she made a wide detour and arrived in time to tremble for him when she saw the horse break ranks. Finally, her carriage passing rapidly out through one of the town gates, she managed to make her way back to the road down which the king was to pass, and she was able to follow the honor guard at about twenty paces back, in the grandest cloud of dust. Ten thousand peasants cried out, “Long live the king!” when the mayor had the honor of giving his formal address to His Majesty. An hour later, when he had listened to all the speeches, the king went on to enter the town, and the little cannon began firing off shots again rapidly. But an accident resulted—not to the gunners, who had proved themselves at Leipzig and Montmirail<sup>72</sup>—but to the future first deputy, Monsieur de Moirod. His horse deposited him gently right down into the only mud

puddle on the whole street, and this caused quite a scene, for he had to be pulled up and out of the puddle in order to allow the king's carriage to pass.

His Majesty got down from his carriage before the splendid new church that, on that day, had been hung with all its crimson curtains. The king had to dine and soon thereafter get back into his carriage to go venerate the celebrated relic of Saint Clément. The minute the king entered the church, Julien galloped off to the home of Monsieur de Rênal. There, he removed—with a sigh—his beautiful sky-blue outfit, his saber, and his epaulettes in order to put back on his worn-out old black suit. He got back on his horse and in a few moments was in Bray-le-Haut, which occupies the summit of a grand hill. Enthusiasm is multiplying these peasants, Julien thought. You could hardly move in Verrières, and now here there must be ten thousand of them crowded around this ancient abbey. Half ruined by the vandalism of the Revolution, it had been magnificently restored since the Restoration, and talk of miracles had begun. Julien joined up with Father Chélan, who chastised him strongly and had him change into a cassock and surplice. He quickly put these on and rejoined Monsieur Chélan, who was looking for the young bishop of Agde, a nephew of Monsieur de La Mole, recently installed, who was in charge of showing the relic to the king. But the bishop was nowhere to be found.

The other clergymen were growing impatient. They were awaiting their superior in the dim Gothic cloister of the old abbey. Twenty-four priests had been brought together to represent the old chapter of Bray-le-Haut, which, prior to 1789, had consisted of twenty-four canons. After having spent forty-five minutes deploring the youthfulness of the new bishop, the priests thought it might be a good idea for their dean to go and warn Monseigneur that the king was on his way, and that they ought to be taking their places in the sanctuary. The advanced age of Monsieur de Chélan made him the dean; despite his irritation with Julien, he signaled him to follow. Julien looked fine in his surplice. By means of I don't know what ecclesiastical hairstyling procedure, he had flattened down all his fine curls; but, in an omission that redoubled Monsieur de Chélan's irritation, beneath the hem of the cassock, the spurs of a guard of honor were visible.

When they arrived at the bishop's quarters, a group of splendidly attired servants barely deigned to respond to the old priest, telling him the bishop could not be seen. They laughed at him when he insisted that, in his capacity as dean of the Noble Chapter of Bray-le-Haut, he had the privilege of being admitted at any time to the officiating bishop.

Julien's pride was shocked at the insolence of these lackeys. He hurried off by himself through the dormitories of the old abbey, shaking the handle of every door he came across. One very small one ceded to his efforts, and he found himself in a small room with several valets attached to Monseigneur, all dressed in black, each with a chain around his neck. His air of urgency made the gentlemen think he had been summoned by the bishop, and they let him pass. A few steps beyond, he found himself in an enormous, extremely somber Gothic room, all paneled in black oak; with one exception, all the old ogive windows had been bricked over. The crudeness of the masonry had been left undisguised, and it formed a sad contrast to the antique magnificence of the woodwork. The two sides of the room—quite a famous one among Burgundian antiquaries—which had been built by Charles the Bold around 1470, in expiation of some sin or other, were lined with wooden stalls, each one richly sculpted. The figures, in wood of varying colors, represented all the mysteries of the Apocalypse.

This melancholic magnificence, degraded as it was by the sight of the bare bricks and the still-white plaster, moved Julien. He stopped and stood in silence. At the far end of the room, by the only window that let in daylight, he saw a mahogany-framed psyche mirror.<sup>73</sup> A young man wearing a violet robe with a lace surplice, bareheaded, was standing a few feet from the mirror. The piece of furniture seemed odd in such a place; it undoubtedly had been brought up from the town. Julien could see that the young man seemed irritated by something; with his right hand, he was solemnly giving benedictions toward the mirror.

What's all this? he thought. Is this young priest performing some preliminary ceremony? Maybe he's the bishop's secretary . . . if so, he'll be insolent, like those lackeys . . . but come on, we have to try.

He stepped forward and made his way slowly across the length of the room, keeping his gaze always fixed toward the solitary window, examining the young man who continued giving blessings slowly, a seemingly infinite number of them, never stopping to rest.

The closer he got, the more apparent was the man's air of irritation. The richness of his lace-covered surplice caused Julien to stop involuntarily a few steps from the magnificent mirror.

Finally he thought, it's my duty to speak first. Yet the beauty of the room had moved him, and he inwardly cringed in advance at the harsh words that would no doubt be addressed to him.

The young man caught sight of him in the mirror, turned to him, and, dropping altogether his irritated air, said in the friendliest of tones:

"Well, Monsieur, is it finally ready now?"

Julien stopped short, stupefied. When the young man had turned toward him, Julien had caught sight of the pectoral cross on his chest: this was the bishop of Agde. So young! thought Julien; he's only six or eight years older than me!

And now he was ashamed of his spurs.

"Monseigneur," he replied timidly, "I've been sent by the dean of the chapter, Monsieur Chélan."

"Oh, I've heard good things about him," said the bishop in a polite tone, which doubled Julien's enchantment.

"But I beg your pardon, Monsieur. I thought you were the person who was supposed to bring me my miter. It wasn't packed properly in Paris, and the silver brocade is terribly torn along the top. It's going to look bad," the young bishop added with a melancholy air, "and they're still making me wait here!"

"Monseigneur, I'll go find your miter, if Your Excellency will permit me."

Julien's beautiful eyes had their usual effect.

"Then go, Monsieur," replied the bishop with charming graciousness. "I need it right away. I'm very sorry to keep the gentlemen of the Chapter waiting."

When Julien was halfway across the room, he looked back and saw that the



bishop had resumed making his benedictions. What could that be? Julien wondered. Probably some kind of ecclesiastical preparation for the ceremony that's about to take place. When he arrived in the room where all the servants were gathered, he saw the miter in their hands. Those gentlemen, perhaps because of Julien's imperious expression, gave him the monseigneur's miter.

He felt proud to be carrying it. As he crossed the room, he slowed his step; he carried it with respect. He found the bishop seated before the mirror, but from time to time his right hand, although clearly fatigued, continued to give the blessing. Julien helped him straighten the miter on his head. The bishop shook his head.

"Ah! It'll stay on," he said to Julien, pleased. "Would you mind stepping back a bit?"

With that, the bishop stepped quickly to the middle of the room, and then walked slowly up to the psyche mirror, resuming his irritated air, and solemnly gave a blessing.

Julien stood there, struck with astonishment; he was tempted to understand, but he dared not. The bishop stopped and, quickly shedding his expression of gravity, said to him:

"What do you think of my miter, Monsieur? Does it look good?"

"Very good, Monseigneur."

"It's not too far back on my head? That would look foolish, but wearing it too far down on the front makes it look like an army officer's shako."

"It looks perfect to me."

"The king of \*\*\* is accustomed to clergy who are venerable and probably very grave. Because of my youth, I don't want to seem not serious enough."

And the bishop turned anew to walk up and down, giving his blessings.

Clearly, Julien thought, finally daring to comprehend, he's rehearsing giving the blessing.

A few minutes passed, and then: "I'm ready now," said the bishop. "Go on, Monsieur, and tell the dean and the gentlemen of the Chapter.

Soon, Monsieur Chélan, followed by the two eldest of the priests, entered through an immense, elegantly carved door, one that Julien had not noticed.

But this time he stayed in his place at the rear of the group, so he was only able to see the bishop over the shoulders of all the ecclesiastics who were crowding toward the door.

The bishop proceeded slowly across the room; when he arrived at the doorway, the priests all lined up to form a procession. There was a moment of confusion, but then the procession started off, chanting a psalm. The bishop came last, flanked by Monsieur Chélan and another very aged priest. Julien slipped in close to the monseigneur, as the assistant to Abbé Chélan. They made their way down the long corridors of the Bray-le-Haut abbey; despite the bright sun outside, the corridors were dim and damp. Eventually they arrived at the portico of the cloisters. Julien was speechless with admiration at so splendid a ceremony. He alternated between the ambition that the youth of the bishop aroused in him and the attraction exerted by the prelate's exquisite manner. His polish and charm were something else entirely than those of Monsieur de Rênal, even on his good days. The higher up in society you go, Julien said to himself, the more you'll find this kind of charming manners.

The procession entered the church by a side door, but suddenly a horrible outburst of noise resounded under the ancient vaulted ceilings: Julien thought the place might be collapsing. It was the little cannon again; hauled along by eight horses at a gallop, it had just arrived, and the Leipzig gunners had set immediately to work firing it off, five shots a minute, as vigorously as if there were Prussians in front of it.

But that admirable racket no longer stirred Julien; he was no longer thinking of Napoleon and military glory. So young! he was saying to himself. So young to be the bishop of Agde! But where is Agde? And what's the post worth? Two or three hundred thousand francs, I'll bet.

Monseigneur's servants appeared, carrying a magnificent canopy. Monsieur Chélan took one of its poles, but Julien was the one who actually carried it. The bishop took his place below it. He had really managed to give himself the appearance of an old man; our hero's admiration knew no bounds. There's nothing you can't accomplish with a little skill! he thought.

The king now entered. Julien had the good fortune of seeing him up close.

The bishop addressed him with zeal, not forgetting to add just the kind of emotional tone that would most please His Majesty. We will not go on to give a minute description of the ceremonies at Bray-le-Haut; those details filled the columns of all the papers in the département for the next two weeks. Julien learned from the bishop's address that the king was a descendant of Charles the Bold.

Later, one of Julien's duties was to check over the accounts listing what the ceremony had cost. Monsieur de La Mole, who had obtained a bishop's post for his nephew, wanted to pay him the compliment of taking on the entire expense himself. This one ceremony at Bray-le-Haut had cost three thousand eight hundred francs.

After the bishop's address and the king's response, His Majesty took his place beneath the canopy, then knelt down most piously on a cushion close to the altar. The chancel area was lined with stalls that were raised up two steps above the stones of the floor. On the last of the steps sat Julien, at Monsieur Chélan's feet, a little like a trainbearer beside his cardinal in the Sistine Chapel in Rome. There was a "Te Deum," clouds of incense, endless discharges of muskets and the cannon; the peasants were drunk with happiness and piety. A single day like that undoes the work of a hundred issues of Jacobin newspapers.

Julien was six steps away from the king, who was in fact praying fervidly. He noticed for the first time a short man, intelligent looking, wearing a coat almost bare of embroidery. But there was a sky-blue ribbon pinned to that very simple suit.<sup>74</sup> He was closer to the king than many other noblemen, whose clothes were so thickly covered with gold embroidery that, as Julien put it, you couldn't make out the cloth. He learned a few moments later that this was Monsieur de La Mole. He thought there was a haughty, insolent manner about him.

This marquis wouldn't have the polished manners of my handsome bishop, he thought. Ah, it's the ecclesiastic life that makes a man refined and wise. But the king has come to venerate the relic, and I don't see any relic. Where is our Saint Clément?

A little cleric next to him informed him that the venerable relic was in the upper part of the abbey, in a *chapelle ardente*.

What's a *chapelle ardente*? Julien asked himself.

But he didn't want to ask for an explanation of the term. His attention to the ceremony intensified.

In a situation where a sovereign prince visits, etiquette demands that the canons do not accompany the bishop. But as he started up toward the *chapelle ardente*, the bishop of Agde called for Abbé Chélan; Julien made bold to follow him.

After having mounted a long staircase, they came to a door that was very small but gilded magnificently. It seemed to have been finished quite recently.

Outside the door, all kneeling, were twenty-four girls, all from the most distinguished families in Verrières. Before opening the door, the bishop got down on his knees among the girls, every one of them very pretty. As he prayed aloud with them, they seemed unable to keep from admiring his splendid lace, his fine demeanor, and his face, so youthful and so handsome. The sight was all it took for our hero to lose what was left of his reason. At that moment, he would have gone to war for the Inquisition, and in full sincerity too. Suddenly, the door opened. The little chapel seemed to be ablaze with light. Upon the altar were a thousand candles, divided into eight rows, the rows separated from each other by bouquets of flowers. The rich odor of the purest incense came wafting out through the sanctuary door like a cloud. The chapel, newly gilded, was very small but very high-ceilinged. Julien noted that some of the candles on the altar stood fifteen feet tall. The girls could not refrain from uttering little cries of admiration. The only ones to enter the small vestibule of the chapel were the twenty-four girls, the two clerics, and Julien.

Soon the king arrived, followed only by Monsieur de La Mole and his first chamberlain. The guards themselves remained outside the door, all on their knees, presenting their arms.

His Majesty hurled himself down with force upon the prie-dieu. Only then did Julien, pressed up against the gilded door, catch a glimpse, under the bare arm of one of the girls, of the charming statue of Saint Clément. It was tucked under the altar, representing him in the garb of a young Roman soldier. There was a large wound in his throat; blood seemed to be flowing from it. The sculp-

tor had outdone himself; the saint's dying eyes, filled with grace, were half closed. The faint beginnings of a mustache adorned the lovely mouth, which, half-open, seemed to be in prayer. At the sight, the girl nearest to Julien began weeping hot tears; one of her tears dropped onto his hand.

After a moment of prayers in the profoundest silence, disturbed only by the distant sound of bells from all the villages for ten leagues around, the bishop of Agde formally asked the king for permission to speak. He proceeded to give a short, simple, moving discourse, the effect of which was all but assured.

"Never forget, young Christians, that you have just seen one of the greatest kings of the earth go down on his knees before the servants of our almighty, terrible God. These poor servants are persecuted and martyred here on earth, as you can see from the bleeding wound of Saint Clement, but they have their triumph in heaven. You will never forget this day, will you, young Christians? You will always detest impiety. You will always remain faithful to this God, so great, so terrible but so good."

With that, the bishop drew himself up with authority.

"You'll promise me, won't you?" he said, holding out his arms, like someone in a state of inspiration.

"We promise," said the young girls, bursting into tears.

"And I hear and accept your promise, in the name of the terrible God," the bishop added in a thunderous voice. With that, the ceremony was concluded.

The king himself was weeping. It was only long after that Julien was composed enough to ask where it was, the bone of the saint that Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, had had sent from Rome.<sup>75</sup> He learned that it was hidden away inside that same lovely wax figure.

His Majesty deigned to permit the young girls who had accompanied him in the chapel to wear a red ribbon, on which these words were embroidered:

HATRED OF IMPIETY, PERPETUAL ADORATION.

Monsieur de La Mole distributed ten thousand bottles of wine to the peasants. That evening, in Verrières, the Liberals thought it best to illuminate their houses a hundredfold over those of the Royalists.<sup>76</sup> Before he left, the king paid a visit to Monsieur de Moiroud.

# TO THINK IS TO SUFFER

*The grotesque aspect of ordinary events  
conceals the true misery of the passions.*

**BARNAVE**

While putting back the ordinary furniture in the room that the Marquis de La Mole had occupied, Julien came across a thick piece of paper, folded into four pages. He read at the bottom of the first one:

To His Lordship the Marquis de La Mole, peer of France, knight of the orders of the king, etc., etc.

It was a petition, delivered in the crude handwriting of a kitchen domestic.

Monsieur le Marquis,

I have followed religious principles all my life. I was, in Lyon, exposed to the bombs during the siege of the year '93, of hateful memory.<sup>77</sup> I am a faithful communicant; I go to mass every Sunday at my parish church. I have never omitted any of my Easter duties, even in '93, of hateful memory. My cook, before the Revolution I employed servants, my cook always observes Fridays. I enjoy in Verrières a general respect, and I daresay it is merited. I march beneath the canopy in all the processions right next to Monsieur the priest and Monsieur the mayor. I carry, on important occasions, a great candle, which I pay for myself. Documentation for this can be found in the Ministry of Finance in Paris. I now ask Monsieur le Marquis for the post of lottery officer<sup>78</sup> for Verrières, which is sure to fall vacant soon in one way or

another, for the current holder of the post is very ill, besides which he always votes the wrong way in the elections; etc.

de Cholin

In the margin of this petition was an endorsement, signed de Moirod, which began with the following:

I had the honor of speaking yesserday<sup>79</sup> with the honorable subject of the king who makes this request . . .

Julien said to himself, so, even that imbecile de Cholin shows me the path I must follow.

A week after the visit of the king of \*\*\* to Verrières, what stood out among the innumerable lies, inane interpretations, ridiculous discussions, etc., etc., which had as their subject, successively, the king, the bishop of Agde, the Marquis de La Mole, the ten thousand bottles of wine, tumbledown de Moirod, who, in hopes of being decorated with a cross, refused to leave his house for a month after his fall—what stood out was the extreme indecency of Julien Sorel, son of the carpenter, having been *thrown like a bomb* into the midst of the guard of honor. You wouldn't believe it, listening to what the wealthy calico manufacturers had to say about it, the very ones who used to talk themselves hoarse in the cafés with their preaching of social equality. That arrogant woman, Madame de Rênal, was the instigator of this abomination. And why? Well, the dreamy eyes and the fresh pink cheeks of the little Abbé Sorel can give you the answer.

Not long after they had returned to Vergy, Stanislas-Xavier, the youngest of the children, came down with a fever; Madame de Rênal was immediately overcome with horrific remorse. For the first time, she now reproached herself for her love in a consistent, thoroughgoing manner. She seemed to understand now, as if by a miracle, the enormity of the sin into which she had let herself fall. Though she was always of a religious nature, until this moment she had not thought about the severity of her crime in the eyes of God.

In the past, at the Sacred Heart convent, she had loved God passionately;

now, in this new situation, she feared him with an equal passion. The inner battles that were tearing her apart were all the more terrifying for there being no rational basis for her fear. Julien saw that any rational appeal had no calming effect; she saw in such appeals the language of hell. But since Julien did love little Stanislas, he was welcome to speak with her about the illness, which began to grow even more serious. Remorse continued to gnaw at Madame de Rênal to the point of disturbing her sleep; she maintained a fierce silence; if she were to open her mouth, it would be to confess her crime to God and man.

"I beg you," Julien said to her when they found themselves alone, "don't speak to anybody. Let me be the sole confidant of your grief. If you still love me at all, don't speak. Your words can't alleviate little Stanislas's fever." But his consolations had no effect; he didn't realize that Madame de Rênal had taken it into her head that to appease the anger of her jealous God, she had only two choices: hate Julien, or watch her son die. And because she sensed that she could never hate her lover, she suffered all the more.

"Go away from me," she said to Julien one day. "In God's name, leave this house. It's your presence here that's killing my child.

"God is punishing me," she added, whispering, "and he is just. I adore his justice. My crime is hideous, and I was living with no remorse! That was the first sign that I had turned my back on God. I deserve twice the punishment."

This deeply moved Julien. He could see no hypocrisy in it, no exaggeration. She thinks loving me is killing her child, but the poor woman loves me more than her child. Well, there isn't any doubt about it: remorse is killing her; and that shows how powerful our feelings are. But how on earth could I have inspired such a love—me, so poor, so badly brought up, so ignorant, and sometimes so vulgar in my ways?

One night, the child's condition turned even worse. Around two in the morning, Monsieur de Rênal went in to check on him. The child, burning up with fever, was extremely flushed, and could not recognize his father. Madame de Rênal abruptly threw herself at her husband's feet: Julien could see that she was about to reveal everything and ruin herself forever.

But luckily, her extreme reaction annoyed Monsieur de Rênal.



“Goodnight! Goodnight!” he exclaimed as he walked away.

“No, listen to me!” cried his wife, on her knees before him, trying to keep him there. “You need to learn the truth. I’m the one who’s killing my son. I gave him life, and now I’m taking it away from him. Heaven is punishing me. In God’s eyes, I’m guilty of murder. I have to ruin myself, bring myself down, and maybe that sacrifice will appease the Lord.”

If Monsieur de Rênal had been a man of any imagination, he would have understood everything.

“Romantic ideas!” he cried, pushing his wife away as she tried to embrace his knees. “All this is nothing but romantic ideas! Julien, send for the doctor at daybreak.” And with that he went back to his bed. Madame de Rênal fell to her knees, half fainting, pushing Julien away with a convulsive movement when he tried to help her up.

Julien stood there stunned.

So this is adultery! he said to himself. Is it possible that those hypocrite priests were actually . . . right? That they, the ones who commit so many sins themselves, turn out to have the privilege of understanding the truth about sin? How bizarre!

For the next twenty minutes after Monsieur de Rênal had retired, Julien watched the woman he loved, her head resting on the child’s bed, immobile, practically unconscious. That’s a truly superior woman, he said to himself, brought down to the depths of misery, and all because she knew me.

The hours passed swiftly by. What can I do for her? I have to make a decision. This is more than just me. What do I care about men and all their foolish playacting? What can I do for her? . . . Leave her? But I’d be leaving her alone in the grip of the most terrible sorrow. That automaton of a husband of hers does more harm to her than good. He’ll say something harsh to her, out of his natural crudity; she might go mad, might throw herself out a window.

If I leave her, if I stop watching over her, she’ll confess everything to him. And who knows, despite his hopes for the inheritance she brings him, he might make a scandal of it. She could even tell everything—good God!—to that fake, Abbé Maslon, who takes the illness of a six-year-old as an excuse for never

budging out of this house, and he has his own agenda too. In her grief and her fear of God, she forgets everything she knows about the man, and sees only the priest.

“Go away,” Madame de Rênal suddenly said, opening her eyes.

“I’d give up my life a thousand times over if I could be sure of what would be best for you,” Julien replied. “I’ve never loved you so much, my dear angel, or rather, it’s only now that I’ve begun to adore you as you deserve. What would become of me if I go away, knowing you’re suffering for me? But my own sorrow isn’t the issue. I’ll leave, yes, my love. But, if I leave you, if I leave off watching over you, putting myself constantly between you and your husband, you’ll tell him everything and destroy yourself. Think about the disgrace when he drives you out of his house. All Verrières, and all Besançon will be talking about the scandal. They’ll heap you with all the blame. You’ll never recover from shame like that . . .”

“It’s the only thing I ask for,” she cried, standing up. “I’ll suffer—and that’s just what I should do!”

“But that horrible scandal will hurt him too!”

“I’ll humble myself. I’ll throw myself into the mud, and maybe that way I’ll save my son. Being humiliated in the eyes of everyone else, maybe that’s my public penance. In my weakness right now, as far as I can tell, might that not be the greatest sacrifice I can offer to God? . . . Maybe he’ll deign to accept my own humiliation and leave me my son. If you can show me some other sacrifice, something even more painful, I’ll take it.”

“Let me punish myself. I’m guilty too. Would you like me to retire to La Trappe?<sup>80</sup> The austerity of that life might appease your God . . . Oh, if only I could take little Stanislas’s sickness upon myself . . .”

“Ah, you love him, you do” cried Madame de Rênal, standing up again and flinging herself into his arms.

But then immediately she turned and pushed him away with horror.

“I believe you! I believe you,” she went on, getting back down on her knees. “Oh, my friend, my only friend! Oh, why couldn’t you be the father of Stanislas! Then it wouldn’t be such a horrible sin to love you more than your son.”

“Shall I stay on, but with the understanding that from now on you love me only as a brother? That’s the only expiation that seems to make sense, and it might appease the wrath of the Most High.”

“But I,” she cried, rising up and taking Julien’s head between her hands, gazing at him from arm’s length, “I—could I love you as a brother? Do I have the strength to love you only as a brother?”

Julien broke down in tears.

“I’ll obey your wishes,” he said, dropping down to her feet; “I’ll obey and do whatever you order me to do. That’s the only thing left for me to do. I feel as if my brain has gone blind—I can’t see any good path to follow. If I leave you, you’ll tell everything to your husband, ruining yourself and him along with you. After that disgrace he’ll never be elected député. If I stay, you’ll see me as the cause of your son’s death, and you’ll die of grief. What if we tried it, tried to see what the effect of my leaving would be? If you like, I’ll take the punishment for our sin and stay away for a week. I can go off on a retreat, wherever you like. At the abbey of Bray-le-Haut, for example. But you have to swear to me you won’t tell anything to your husband while I’m gone. Understand that I can never return if you do tell him.”

She promised, and he left, but she called him back two days later.

“It’s impossible. I can’t keep my oath while you’re gone. I’ll tell all to my husband if you aren’t there, using your gaze to order me to stay silent. Every hour of this ghastly life seems like a whole day.”

Finally, heaven took pity on the suffering mother. Little by little, Stanislas began to come out of danger. But now the ice was broken. She had recognized the extent of her sin; she couldn’t recover her equilibrium. Her remorse never left her, and it operated exactly the way it could be expected to in a heart as sincere as hers. Her life vacillated between heaven and hell—hell when she no longer saw Julien, and heaven when she was at his feet. “I have no illusions anymore,” she said to him, even in the moments when she dared to abandon herself to her love. “I’m damned, damned beyond remission. You’re young, and you gave in to my seductions, so heaven may pardon you, but as for me, I’m damned. I know it from a certain sign. I’m afraid: who wouldn’t be afraid at the

sight of hell? But deep inside, I don't repent at all. I would commit the same sin all over again if I had the chance. If heaven will just let me go unpunished in this world, me and my children, then I'll have more than I deserve. But you, my Julien," she would suddenly cry out in other moments, "are you happy? Do you feel I love you enough?"

Julien's suspicious nature, along with his pride, demanded a love that made sacrifices, but he could not bear the sight of so great a sacrifice, one so undoubted, one renewed every moment. He adored Madame de Rênal. Even though she's a noble and I'm just a laborer's son, she loves me . . . I'm not just some valet given the task of being her lover. That fear disposed of, Julien let himself tumble into all the follies of love, and into all its deadly uncertainties.

When she saw him doubting her love, she cried, "At least let me make you happy for the few days we have together! Let's not lose time. Tomorrow, maybe, I won't be yours anymore. If God wants to strike at me through my children, I won't have the strength to keep on living for love of you, or to pretend that it wasn't my sin that killed them. I couldn't survive a blow like that. Even if I wanted to, I couldn't. I'd go mad.

"If only I could take your sin on me, the way you offered so generously to take the fever that was burning up Stanislas!"

Her great moral crisis made a change in the nature of the love that united Julien and his mistress. His love was no longer just admiration of her beauty, or pride in possessing her.

Their happiness henceforth became something far superior, the flame that burned them now a more intense one. They experienced ecstasies akin to madness. Their happiness would have seemed even greater to an observer. But they never again found the delicious serenity, the cloudless days of felicity, the easy happiness of the first period of their love, when Madame de Rênal's only fear was of not being loved enough by Julien. Their happiness now began to resemble, in certain respects, a crime.

In their happiest moments, moments that outwardly would appear to be their most tranquil—"Oh, great God! I can see hell!" Madame de Rênal would suddenly cry out, gripping Julien's hand convulsively. "Oh, the tortures! So

horrible! And I deserve them so!” And she would cling to him, as tightly as ivy to a tree.

Julien tried, in vain, to calm her agitated soul. She held on to his hand, covering it with kisses. Then, when she had fallen back into a somber reverie, “Hell will be,” she said, “a kind of blessing for me. I’d still have some days I could spend here on earth with him, but the hell here on earth, the death of my children . . . But that price might be high enough for my sin to be pardoned. Those poor children haven’t offended you. It’s me, me, I’m the guilty one. I’m in love with a man who isn’t my husband.”

Julien watched as Madame de Rênal returned to some semblance of calmness. She tried to get a grip on herself; she didn’t want to poison the life of the man she loved.

In the midst of these vacillations between love, remorse, and pleasure, the days passed by as swiftly as lightning. Julien fell out of the habit of reflecting.

Mademoiselle Élisabeth went off to oversee a small lawsuit she was pursuing in Verrières. She found Monsieur Valenod quite angry with Julien. She hated the tutor, and the two of them talked often about him.

“You’d ruin me, Monsieur, if I told you the truth!” she said to Monsieur Valenod one day. “Masters always stick together in important things . . . they’d never forgive us poor domestics for saying certain things . . .”

After a set of similar conventional phrases, which Monsieur Valenod knew how to cut short, he learned a number of things quite wounding to his self-esteem.

That woman, the most distinguished one in the region, the one he had surrounded with every kind of attention, which, unfortunately, had been observed by everybody—that woman so proud, whose rebuffs had often left him blushing and embarrassed—she had taken on as a lover a little working-class boy disguised as a tutor. And so that nothing would be lacking to spite the director of the poorhouse, Madame de Rênal evidently adored her lover. “And besides,” the maid added with a sigh, “Monsieur Julien never had to go to any trouble to make his conquest. He’s always been cold toward her, and he never changed.”

Élisabeth had only come to be certain of it during their time in the country, but

she thought the affair had begun well before that. “That must be why,” she added with bitterness, “he refused to marry me back then. And me, like an imbecile, I actually went to Madame de Rênal for advice! I begged her to speak to the tutor for me!”

That same evening Monsieur de Rênal received, along with his newspaper, a long, anonymous letter informing him, in great detail, as to what had been going on in his home. Julien saw him go pale as he read that letter, written on light blue paper, and cast an evil glance in his direction. The mayor remained troubled all evening, and it was in vain that Julien asked him for some information regarding the genealogies of some of the best families in Burgundy.

## 20

# ANONYMOUS LETTERS

*Do not give dalliance*

*Too much the rein: the strongest oaths are straw*

*To the fire i' the blood.*

**THE TEMPEST (IV.1.51–53)**

As they were leaving the drawing room toward midnight, Julien found a moment to say to his lover:

“Let’s not see each other tonight. Your husband is suspicious. I’d swear that long letter he was reading so angrily was an anonymous one.”

Fortunately, Julien went on to lock himself into his bedroom. Madame de Rênal took the foolish idea into her head that this was just a ruse, that he didn’t want to see her. She completely lost her head and went to his room at the usual time. Julien, hearing sounds in the corridor, snuffed out his lamp at once.

Someone was trying to open his door: was it Madame de Rênal, or the jealous husband?

Early the next day, the cook, who was on Julien's side, brought him a book, on the cover of which were written these words in Italian: *Guardate alla pagina 130*.<sup>81</sup>

The imprudence made Julien shudder, but he quickly opened the book to page 130 and found a note fastened there with a pin; it had been written in haste, it was wet with tears, and it clearly had been dashed off with no regard to spelling. Ordinarily, Madame de Rênal was very careful with spelling; the detail touched him now and made him forget the frightening imprudence of it all.

You didn't want to let me in last night? There are moments when I think I've never known your heart at all. Your expression frightened me. I'm afraid of you. Good God! Did you ever love me? In that case, let my husband discover our love affair, and let him lock me up forever somewhere out in the country, far from my children. Maybe that's what God wants. I'll die soon. But you'll be a monster.

So you don't love me, you're tired of my madness, my remorse, godless man? Do you want to be rid of me? I'll make it easy for you. Go, take this letter and show it all around Verrières, or rather just show it to Monsieur Valenod. Tell him I love you, but no, don't speak such a blasphemy; tell him that I adore you, that my life only began with you the day I first saw you; tell him that in the wildest dreams of my youth I never imagined the kind of happiness you've given me; that I've sacrificed my life for you, my soul too. And you know that I'd sacrifice even more, much more.

But what does that man know about sacrifices? Tell him, tell him just to make him angry, that I defy everyone who wishes me ill, and that the only thing in the world that would be a misfortune for me would be to see change in the one man who keeps me alive. What happiness it would be for me to lose that life, to offer it as a sacrifice, and not have to fear for my children anymore!

Never doubt for a minute, my dear friend, that if there were an any-

mous letter, that it came from that odious creature who's been pursuing me for the last six years with his ugly voice, his stories about how high his horses have jumped, his fatuousness, his eternal enumeration of all his splendid qualities.

Is there an anonymous letter? You devil, that's what I wanted to talk over with you; but no, you were right. If I had been holding you in my arms for what might have been the very last time, I wouldn't have had the strength to discuss this coolly, the way I can when I'm alone. From now on, our happiness won't be so easy to achieve. Will it bother you at all? Yes, on the days when you haven't received some amusing book from Monsieur Fouqué. The sacrifice is made; tomorrow, whether there's an anonymous letter or not, I'll tell my husband that I've received an anonymous letter, and that he must immediately find you some smooth exit, find some reasonable pretext, and send you back at once to your family.

Alas, my dear friend, we're going to be separated for two weeks, maybe even a month! But I'll do you the justice to say that you'll suffer as much as I will. Anyway, this is the only means available for counteracting that anonymous letter; it's not the first one my husband has received, and concerning me too. But oh, how I once laughed at them!

The whole goal of my scheme is to make my husband think that the letter came from Monsieur Valenod; I'm absolutely certain that it did. If you leave the house, be sure to go find a place in Verrières. I'll arrange things so that my husband gets the idea of going to spend a couple of weeks there, to prove to the fools that there's no tension between him and me. Once you're in Verrières, be on friendly terms with everyone, even the Liberals. I know all their wives will seek you out.

Don't quarrel with Monsieur Valenod, and don't go cutting off his ears, as you were saying the other day; on the contrary, treat him with every politeness. The essential thing is that people in Verrières think you're going to be moving into Valenod's house, or somebody else's, to be tutor to their children.



And that's the one thing my husband will never tolerate. But if he does let it happen, all right—at least you'll be living in Verrières, and I'll be able to see you sometimes. My children love you, and they'll want to visit you. Good God, I think I love my children more because they love you. Such remorse! How will it all end? . . . But I've lost my train of thought . . . Well, you understand how you must behave: be sweet, polite, never show contempt for those vulgar people, I'm begging you on my knees: they're going to be the arbiters of our fate. Never doubt for a minute that my husband will see you exactly the way public opinion sees you.

You're the one who will provide me with this anonymous letter: gather your patience and a pair of scissors. Cut the words you'll see below out of a book, and then glue them onto the sheet of light blue paper I'll give you; it's a sheet Valenod sent me. Take precautions in case there's a search of your room: burn the pages of the book that you've cut up. If you can't find the words you need, form them yourself, letter by letter. To make it easier on you, I've kept the anonymous letter short. But alas, if you don't love me anymore, which I fear is true, how long this letter must seem to you!

#### ANONYMOUS LETTER

Madame,

All your little secret intrigues are known; but the persons who should want to put a stop to them have been informed. From the remains of my friendship for you, I urge you to cut all ties with that little peasant. If you're wise enough to do that, your husband will believe that the information he was sent is wrong, and he can be left in that error. Remember that I know your secret; you ought to tremble, you miserable woman; from now on, you'd better walk the straight and narrow, and you'd better be sure I see it.

Now, as soon as you've finished gluing the words of this letter (and can't you hear the director's voice in it?), come down into the house, and I'll meet you.

I'll go into the village then, and I'll return with a troubled look on my face;

in fact, I will be greatly troubled. Great God, what a risk I'm running here, and all because you "thought you saw" an anonymous letter. Well, with a sad expression, I'll hand this letter to my husband, saying some unknown person gave it to me. You go out, take the children on a walk on the path toward the woods, and I'll be back at dinner time.

From up on the rocks, you can see the tower of the old dovecot. If everything is going well, I'll put a white handkerchief there; but if not, there'll be nothing there.

You ungrateful man, won't your heart let you find some way of telling me you love me before you head off on that walk? Whatever happens, rest assured of one thing: if we ever part definitively, I won't survive another day. Oh, what a bad mother! Those two words I just wrote—they don't have any effect on me, dear Julien. I don't feel them; I can only think of you right now, and I wrote them only so you won't blame me. Now that I see myself on the verge of losing you, what's the point of dissimulation? Yes! Even if my soul seems hideous to you, I won't lie to the man I adore! I've said too many lies already in my life. Go then; I forgive you if you don't love me anymore. I don't have the time to reread this letter. In my eyes, paying with my life for the happy days I've spent in your arms is a small price. And you know it's going to cost me even more.

## 21

# A TALK WITH A MASTER

*Alas, our frailty is the cause, not we;  
For such as we are made of, such we be.*

**TWELFTH NIGHT (II.2.30–31)**

Julien took a childish pleasure in the hour he spent assembling the words for the letter. As he left his room, he encountered his pupils and their mother; she took the letter from him with a simplicity and a courage, the calmness of which frightened him.

“Is the glue dry?” she asked him.

He thought, can this be the woman who was driven half-mad by remorse? What’s she planning to do now? He was too proud to ask her, but probably she had never seemed more attractive to him.

With the same cool composure, she added:

“If this goes wrong, I’ve lost everything. Take this and hide it somewhere up in the mountains. It might turn out someday to be my only resource.”

She handed him a small case of red morocco with a glass top; inside it were gold and some diamonds.

“Now go,” she told him.

She kissed the children, the youngest one twice. Julien stood motionless. She got up and walked away quickly, without even looking at him.

From the moment when he opened the anonymous letter, Monsieur de Rênal’s existence had become a trial. He had not been so agitated since 1816, when he had almost had to fight a duel, and, to do him justice, the prospect of taking a bullet would have made him less miserable. He examined the letter from every angle: The handwriting is a woman’s, isn’t it? he said to himself. If so, who is the woman who wrote it? He pictured in turn all the Verrières women he knew, but he was unable to fix his suspicions on any one of them. Could a man have dictated the letter? But then, which man? The same incertitude here; he had engendered resentment and no doubt hatred in most of the people he knew. I need to ask my wife, he said to himself out of habit, getting up out of the armchair in which had been slumped.

But as soon as he was up, Good God! he exclaimed, slapping his forehead. She’s precisely the one I can’t trust. She’s my enemy now. Tears of rage came to his eyes.

As a fitting recompense for the hard-heartedness that passes for wisdom in

the provinces, it turned out that the two men who Monsieur de Rênal feared most at the moment were his two most intimate friends.

And after those two, I have maybe ten friends; he considered each of them in turn, trying to determine how much consolation he could expect from each. Every one of them! he cried to himself in his rage, every one of them will take the greatest possible delight in hearing about my horrible situation. Fortunately, he believed he was widely envied, and not without reason. There was not only his superb house in town, upon which the king of \*\*\* had shed eternal glory by spending a night there, but also there was the fine piece of work he had made of his château in Vergy. Its facade was painted white, its windows fitted with splendid green shutters. For a moment, the thought of its magnificence consoled him. In point of fact, this château could be seen from three or four leagues' distance, to the great detriment of all the other so-called châteaux in the neighborhood, which retained the humble gray coloring that time had imparted to them.

Monsieur de Rênal could count on sympathetic tears from only one of his friends, the churchwarden, but the man was an imbecile who would weep at anything. Still, the man was his only option.

Was there ever any misery like mine? he cried out bitterly. I'm so alone!

Is it possible, the genuinely pitiable man asked himself, is it truly possible that in my trouble I have not a single friend I can call on—because I'm losing my reason, I can feel it! Oh, Falcoz! Oh, Ducros! he exclaimed with bitterness. These were the names of two childhood friends whom he had alienated by his arrogant behavior in 1814.<sup>82</sup> They did not belong to the nobility, and he had made an effort to end the tone of equality that had marked their friendship.

One of them, Falcoz, a man of intelligence and courage, a paper merchant in Verrières, had bought a printing shop in the main town of the département and had started up a newspaper. The Congrégation had determined to ruin him; his paper was condemned, and his printer's license canceled. In those miserable circumstances, he had written to Monsieur de Rênal for the first time in ten years. The mayor of Verrières decided to reply to him in the grand style of an ancient Roman: "If the king's minister did me the honor of asking my advice,

I would tell him this: 'Do away with every printing house in the provinces, and do it pitilessly; make printing a royal monopoly, like tobacco.' This letter to a once close friend had at the time impressed everyone in Verrières, but now Monsieur de Rênal recalled his phrases with horror. Who could have told me that I, with my rank, my fortune, my decorations, would come to regret it one day? And so it was in transports of rage—sometimes directed at himself, sometimes at those around him—that he passed a horrible night; but fortunately, the idea of spying on his wife never occurred to him.

I'm accustomed to Louise, he said to himself. She knows about all my dealings. Even if I were free tomorrow to remarry, I could never find anyone to replace her. He then tried to soothe himself with the thought that his wife was innocent; seeing her that way would make it unnecessary for him to show any strength of character, and it made everything much smoother. After all, how many times haven't we all heard women being slandered!

But then, he exclaimed suddenly, pacing the room compulsively: Am I supposed to just let her treat me like I'm nothing, some barefoot nobody she can mock with her lover? And am I supposed to let all Verrières laugh at me for turning a blind eye? Remember the things they say about Charmier (this was the name of a well-known local cuckold). Every time his name is mentioned, you see a smile on everybody's lips. He's a good lawyer, but who do you ever hear praising his talents in the courtroom? "Oh, Charmier," they say, "Bernard's Charmier," using the name of the man who disgraces him.

At other moments, Monsieur de Rênal thought, thank heaven I don't have a daughter, so the way I'm going to punish the mother won't do any damage to my sons' future prospects. I can surprise the little peasant with my wife and kill them both. If I did that, the tragedy of the whole business might do away with the ridicule. The idea made him smile; he allowed himself to paint the scene in all its details. The penal code is on my side, and no matter what happens the Congrégation and my friends on the jury will save me. He examined his hunting knife with its sharp blade, but the thought of blood frightened him.

I could thrash that insolent tutor and kick him out, but then imagine all the gossip in Verrières—even the whole département! After they suppressed Fal-

coz's newspaper, when his head editor was released from prison, I saw to it that he lost his position, worth six hundred francs. I hear that the scribbler has set himself up in Besançon. He could attack me from there in a way that makes it impossible for me to have him hauled up before the tribunal. Haul him up before the tribunal! . . . He'd just find a hundred insolent ways of insinuating that everything he said was true. A well-born gentleman like myself who asserts his rank will always be hated by the plebeians. I can see myself in those horrible Paris newspapers—oh, my God! What a disaster! To see the ancient name of Rênal plunged down into the mud of ridicule . . . If I ever traveled, I'd have to use another name—but what? Abandon the name that carries my entire reputation, the name that is all my strength? Oh, I couldn't be any more miserable!

Now if I don't kill my wife, but instead throw her out of the house in disgrace, she still has her aunt in Besançon—who will simply turn around and hand over her entire fortune. My wife will go live in Paris with Julien. Everyone in Verrières will know all about it, and again I'll be the dupe. The unhappy man then observed from his dimming lamp that day was beginning to dawn. He went out into the garden for a little fresh air. That was the moment when he almost made up his mind not to create any sort of scene, because it was precisely a scene that would most delight his fine friends in Verrières.

Walking in the garden calmed him a bit. No, he exclaimed, I will certainly not part with my wife. She's just too useful to me. He imagined, aghast, what life in his house would be like without his wife; his only relative was the Marquise de R\*\*\*, who was old, stupid, and mean spirited.

A great idea began to take shape before him, but executing it would demand more character than the poor man happened to possess. If I keep my wife, he thought, I know myself too well: one day, when she's tried my patience, I'll come out and accuse her of this offence. She's a proud woman. We'll quarrel, and it will all happen before she inherits her aunt's estate. And then, ah, how they'll all laugh at me! My wife loves her children, and everything will go to them ultimately. But me—I'll be the laughingstock of Verrières. "Look at him," they'll say, "a man who wasn't even clever enough to get revenge on his wife!"

Wouldn't it be better just to keep my suspicions to myself, and don't try to verify anything? But that way I've tied my own hands, and I can't reproach her with anything.

A minute later, as Monsieur de Rênal's wounded vanity was beginning to reassert itself, he made himself recall all the ruses they talked about at the Casino's<sup>83</sup> billiard room or at the Verrières Noble Circle when some local wit would interrupt play to tell the tale of some deceived husband. Now, how cruel those stories seemed to him!

Good God! Why isn't my wife dead! Then I'd be safe from ridicule. Why couldn't I be a widower! I could go spend half the year in Paris, among the very best society. After that moment of bliss provided by the thought of being a widower, his imagination returned to seeking a method for determining the truth of the matter. Maybe he could slip out some midnight when everyone was sleeping and spread a thin layer of bran in front of Julien's bedroom door. Then in the morning he could see if there were footprints.

But that's no good, he exclaimed suddenly with anger. That sneak Élisabeth would see it, and then everybody in the house would know about my jealousy.

In another story told at the Casino, a husband learned the truth about his deception by fastening a hair, with a bit of wax, to the bedroom doors of his wife and of her gallant.

After those long hours of uncertainty, this method of finding out the truth seemed by far the best to him, and he was planning to make use of it when he turned a corner in the garden and encountered the very woman he had been wishing were dead.

She was returning from the village. She been attending mass in the Vergy church. A tradition that would seem extremely dubious to the cool eyes of a historian, but one she believed, held that the little church was once the chapel attached to the castle of the lord of Vergy. The idea haunted Madame de Rênal the whole time she had planned to be praying in the church. She kept imagining her husband killing Julien during a hunt, as if by accident, and that night making her eat his heart.<sup>84</sup>

My whole fate, she said to herself, depends on what he'll be thinking when

he listens to me. After that fateful fifteen minutes, I might not get a chance to talk with him again. He's not a wise man, not a man guided by reason. If he were, I might be able to use my own feeble reason to figure what he would do or say. He's the one who will decide both our fates; he's the one with the power. But that fate depends on my skill, my ability to guide and shape the thoughts of such an unpredictable creature who's being driven blind by rage and won't be capable of seeing even half of what's before him. Great God! I need skill and a cool head—where am I going to get them?

She regained her composure as though by magic when she entered the garden and saw her husband in the distance. His rumpled hair and clothes showed that he had not slept.

She handed him a letter; its seal had been broken, but it had been folded back up. He didn't look at it, instead staring at his wife with intense, raged eyes.

"This abomination," she said, "was given me by an evil-looking man who claims to know you and who says he owes you a debt of gratitude. He handed it to me as I was passing behind the notary's garden. I ask only one thing of you, and that is for you immediately to send that Monsieur Julien back to his family." Madame de Rênal spoke his name hurriedly, perhaps a little too hurriedly, in order to get over the fearful obstacle of having to utter it.

She was overwhelmed with joy when she perceived the delight she had produced in her husband. From the gaze he had fixed upon her, she could tell that Julien had guessed correctly. Instead of sensing the affliction of this very real situation she was in, she thought instead: What genius! What perfect tact! And in a young man with so little experience—what heights might he rise to? But alas, his success will make him forget me.

Performing that little mental act of admiration for the man she adored completely restored her composure.

She congratulated herself on the step she had taken. I haven't been unworthy of Julien, she told herself, with a sweet, sensual pleasure.

Without saying a word, for fear of committing himself, Monsieur de Rênal examined the second anonymous letter, composed, if the reader will recall, of



printed words cut out and pasted on light blue paper. They're laughing at me from all sides, Monsieur de Rênal thought, feeling exhausted.

And now a new batch of insults to pore over, and all of it because of my wife! He was on the verge of hurling the grossest abuses at her, but the thought of the Besançon inheritance just barely kept him in check. Impelled by the need to destroy something, he crumpled up the paper on which the second anonymous letter had been pasted, and he began pacing back and forth with great strides; he felt the need to put some distance between himself and his wife. But after a few moments he returned to her, somewhat calmer.

"We have to do something—send Julien away," she said to him at once. "After all, he's only the son of a working-class man. You can smooth it over with a few écus, and besides he's smart enough, he won't have any trouble getting a job somewhere else—for example, at Monsieur Valenod's, or with the subprefect de Maugiron; they have children. So you won't be doing him any harm . . ."

"You're speaking like the fool you are," Monsieur de Rênal exclaimed in a terrible voice. "When can you expect to find good sense in a woman? You never see what's reasonable. How could you ever know anything? Your nonchalance, your laziness leave you just enough energy to run around chasing butterflies, you weak creatures we're unlucky enough to have in our families . . ."

Madame de Rênal let him rant, and he did, for a long time; as they say in the region, he was *getting the reins on his anger*.

"Monsieur," she said eventually, "I speak as a woman whose honor has been outraged—that is, her most priceless possession."

Madame de Rênal maintained an inalterable calm during the entire painful conversation, upon which depended the possibility of her continuing to live under the same roof with Julien. She continued seeking out the ideas that might work best in directing the rage of her husband. She was insensible to all the insults he addressed to her. She didn't even hear them; she thought only of Julien. Will he be pleased with me?

"That little peasant we've heaped with attentions and even gifts might be innocent," she said, "but nonetheless he's the basis for the first insult I've ever

received . . . Monsieur! When I read this abominable page, I promised myself that either he or I would be leaving your house.”

“Do you want to make a scandal that’ll disgrace me and you too? You’ll be doing quite a favor to a lot of people in Verrières.”

“True enough, they’re all envious of the prosperity that your intelligent administration has brought you, your family, and the town . . . Well! I’ll go and get Julien to come ask you for a month’s vacation so he can go visit his friend, the wood merchant, in the mountains—a fitting friend for our little employee.”

“Watch what you do,” Monsieur de Rênal replied calmly. “The one thing I want above everything else is for you not to talk to him. You’ll just set him off in a rage, and I’ll end up quarreling with him. You know how skittish our little gentleman is.”

“The young man has no tact at all,” replied Madame de Rênal. “He might be intelligent, you know about that, but when you get to the heart of it, he’s nothing but a peasant. I never had a good opinion of him when he turned down Éliisa’s proposal. It was a sure thing for him, a fortune right at hand, and all because every once in a while, she pays secret visits to Monsieur Valenod.”

“Ah!” said Monsieur de Rênal, his eyes widening. “Julien told you that?”

“No, not in so many words. He always talked about his vocation to the sacred ministry, but believe me, the primary vocation for these little gentlemen is to get their bread. He gave me to understand that he knew something about those secret visits.”

“Well, for my part, I knew nothing about it!” cried Monsieur de Rênal, returning now to the heights of his fury, emphasizing every word. “Things go on in this house and I know nothing about them . . . What? There’s something between Éliisa and Valenod?”

“Oh, that’s an old story, my friend,” Madame de Rênal said with a laugh, “and maybe there’s been no harm done. It started during the days when your good friend Valenod would not have been displeased to find that people in Verrières were thinking there was some kind of platonic love going on between him and me.”

“That idea occurred to me once,” Monsieur de Rênal exclaimed, slapping

the side of his head angrily as he found himself proceeding from discovery to discovery, “but you never said anything about it to me!”

“Why would I—to stir up trouble between two friends over a little meaningless outburst from our dear poorhouse director? Show me a woman in good society who hasn’t received a few clever, even gallant letters.”

“He wrote to you?”

“He wrote a great deal to me.”

“Show me those letters this instant, I demand it!” With that, Monsieur de Rênal swelled himself up to his full six feet.

“I’ll keep them carefully to myself,” she replied, her tone of voice so gentle and calm that it almost sounded nonchalant. “I’ll show them to you someday when you’ve got control of yourself.”

“This instant, damn it!” cried Monsieur de Rênal, mad with rage—and yet happier than he had been at any point in the preceding twelve hours.

“Do you swear to me,” Madame de Rênal said with great solemnity, “that you will never quarrel with the director of the poorhouse over these letters?”

“Quarrel or no quarrel, I can always take the foundlings away from him. But,” he went on, furiously, “I want those letters this instant. Where are they?”

“In one of my desk drawers, but I assure you, I am not about to give you the key.”

“Then I’ll break it open!” he exclaimed, rushing off to his wife’s room.

And he did break it open with an iron bar, that exquisite writing desk of veined mahogany purchased from Paris, the desk he used to pause and polish with the tail of his coat whenever he passed and saw any little spot on it.

Madame de Rênal had hurried up the hundred and twenty steps of the dovecot and was soon tying the corner of a white handkerchief to one of the iron bars on the little window. She was the happiest of women. Tears in her eyes, she looked out at the great forest on the mountain. No doubt, she said to herself, Julien down there, beneath one of the tall beeches, will be able to see this signal. She stood there a long while straining to hear, eventually cursing the constant monotonous chirping of the cicadas and the twittering of the birds. If it weren’t for those annoying sounds, a shout of joy from below would surely

have reached her up there. Her eager gaze swept over the immense slope of dark green, as smooth and unbroken as a meadow, that was formed by the tree-tops. Suddenly overwhelmed, she said to herself, how could he fail to have had the intelligence to devise some signal, something to let me know that his joy is as great as mine? She only came down from the dovecot when she began to fear that her husband might be out looking for her.

When she found him, he was furious. He was reading out Monsieur Valenod's insipid sentences, which were hardly suited for being read with that kind of emotion.

When an interval in her husband's exclamations allowed her to make herself heard:

"I can't help coming back to my original idea," Madame de Rênal said, "that we ought to send Julien off on a trip somewhere. Whatever talent he has for Latin, after all, he's only a peasant, often coarse, often tactless. Every day he thinks he's being sophisticated by paying me exaggerated and even tasteless compliments, things he's learned by heart from some novel . . ."

"He never reads novels!" cried Monsieur de Rênal. "I'm sure of it. Do you think I could be so blind as to be the master of the house and not know what's going on under my own roof?"

"All right then! If he hasn't picked up these ridiculous compliments from his reading, he's coming up with them himself, and that's worse. He's probably spoken of me in those terms in Verrières . . . and come to think of it," added Madame de Rênal, as if struck with a sudden realization, "he might have spoken about me like that in front of Élisabeth—and that's practically the same as speaking directly to Monsieur Valenod."

"Ah!" exclaimed Monsieur de Rênal, slamming his fist down on the table, one of the hardest blows human fist ever delivered, making it and the whole room shake. "The anonymous letter with print and the Valenod letters are all on the same paper."

Finally! thought Madame de Rênal, but she feigned being shocked by the discovery, and seemed to lack the courage to say anything at all, she went over to the far end of the room and sat down on the divan.

The battle was won; now, her next challenge was keeping Monsieur de Rênal from going to speak with the supposed author of the anonymous letter.

“Why can’t you see how inept it would be if you were to go make a scene with Monsieur de Valenod without sufficient proof? Yes, everyone envies you, Monsieur, and why is that? Because of your skills: your wise administration, your wonderfully tasteful buildings, the dowry I brought you, and above all the considerable fortune we can hope to inherit from my dear aunt (though its extent is wildly exaggerated)—all these have made you the first man in Verrières.”

“You left out my birth,” said Monsieur de Rênal with a little smile.

“You’re one of the most distinguished gentlemen in the province,” Madame de Rênal swiftly replied. “If the king’s hands weren’t tied and he could do justice to your birth, you would no doubt be sitting in the Chamber of Peers,” etc.<sup>85</sup> “And with this kind of superb social position, do you really want to create material for jealous people to gossip about?”

“If you were to go talk to Monsieur de Valenod about his anonymous letter, you’d be proclaiming to all Verrières—what am I saying, all Besançon too, all through the whole province—that this little bourgeois who had been, perhaps imprudently, admitted to the society *of a Rênal*, has found a way to insult him. Now, if those letters that you’ve just discovered were to prove that I had responded to Monsieur de Valenod’s little amorous sallies, you would be in the right to kill me, and I would deserve it a hundred times over, but it would not be right for you to show any anger toward him. Think for a minute: all our neighbors are just waiting for some opening to get revenge on you for your superiority. Remember the arrests in 1816 that you were involved in. That man who hid up on your roof . . .”<sup>86</sup>

“I don’t think you’re showing any respect or even friendship toward me,” said Monsieur de Rênal, filled with bitterness at the memory of the incident, adding, “and I haven’t been made a peer!”

“I’ll tell you what I think, my friend,” Madame de Rênal replied with a smile. “I think that I’ll be richer than you, that I’ve been your companion now for twelve years, and that those two points give me claim to have some voice in your decisions, and especially in the business we’re talking about today. So, if

you prefer a Monsieur Julien to me,” she added, scorn evident in her voice, “I’m ready to go spend the winter with my aunt.”

This was said quite pointedly, with the kind of firmness that seeks to cloak itself in politeness; it settled the matter for Monsieur de Rênal. But, in keeping with provincial custom, he kept talking for a long while, going over and over every argument in turn, and his wife let him ramble on, for there was still anger in his voice. Finally, two hours of futile chattering had exhausted the resources of the man, who had been up all night in a rage. He settled on the approach he would take with Monsieur de Valenod, with Julien, and even with Élisabeth.

In the course of this grand scene, Madame de Rênal had once or twice almost felt some sympathy for the very real misery being undergone by this man who, for twelve years, had been her friend. But our true passions are selfish. And besides, she was waiting for him at any moment to refer to the anonymous letter he had received the day before, but the reference never came. Madame de Rênal could not feel truly confident without knowing what might have been suggested to this man upon whom her fate depended. For, in the provinces, the husbands control public opinion. A husband who complains covers himself in ridicule, something that grows less dangerous every day in France. But his wife, if he doesn’t provide her with money, quickly descends to the status of a laborer, earning fifteen sous a day; and even then respectable people will have qualms about employing her.

An odalisque in a harem may love her sultan with all her might, but he is all-powerful, and she can have no hope of escaping his authority through any little tricks or ruses. The vengeance of the master is a terrible thing, bloody but also military and noble: a single blow from the sword puts an end to everything. But in the nineteenth century, a husband kills his wife with blows of public contempt; all doors are closed to her.

Madame de Rênal experienced a shocking sense of imminent danger when she returned to her room and saw the state it was in. The locks on all her pretty little boxes had been broken; several of the floorboards had been torn up. He would have had no pity on me! she said to herself. Ruining this parquet floor

that he had been so proud of—when one of his children comes in with muddy shoes, he goes red with rage. And now look—it’s ruined forever! The sight of this violence silenced the few remaining reproaches she had made to herself over her too rapid victory.

A little before the dinner bell sounded, Julien came in with the children. During their dessert, when the servants were out of the room, Madame de Rênal said to him in a dry tone of voice:

“You’ve been wanting to go spend two weeks in Verrières, and Monsieur de Rênal has decided to grant you leave. You may leave whenever it suits you. However, so that the children don’t fall behind, every day their Latin homework will be sent for you to correct.”

“No, I’ve decided,” said Monsieur de Rênal bitterly, “to grant you one week at the absolute maximum.”

Julien could see from his disturbed expression that he was a man in deep torment.

“He hasn’t settled what he’s going to do yet,” he said to his mistress when they were alone for a moment in the drawing room.

Madame de Rênal quickly narrated everything she had done since the morning.

“The details can wait till tonight,” she said with a laugh.

The perversity of women! thought Julien. What pleasure they take in deceiving us, and what instincts they have for pulling it off.

“You seem both enlightened and blinded by your love,” he said to her with some coolness. “Your conduct today is admirable, but is it really wise to try seeing each other tonight? The house is crawling with enemies. Just think, for example, of the hatred Élisabeth bears toward me.”

“That hatred looks a lot like the passionate indifference you seem to feel for me.”

“Even if I were indifferent, I must try to save you from the danger I’ve put you in. If it’s in the cards that Monsieur de Rênal talks to Élisabeth, with a word she can tell him everything. And then, why wouldn’t he hide himself right outside my door, well armed . . .”

“So, not even a little courage,” said Madame de Rênal with all the hauteur of a child of the nobility.

“I’m not going to sink low enough to start defending my courage,” Julien replied coldly. “That’s just base. But,” he added, taking hold of her hand, “you really don’t know how attached I am to you, and what a joy it is for me to be able to take my leave of you before this cruel absence.”

## 22

# HOW TO BEHAVE IN 1830

*Speech was given to man so that he could conceal his thoughts.*

**THE REVEREND FATHER MALAGRIDA**<sup>87</sup>

As soon as he arrived in Verrières, Julien reproached himself for the way he had treated Madame de Rênal. I would have despised her for a pathetic weak woman if she had been unable to manage the scene with Monsieur de Rênal! But she carried it off like a diplomat, and here I am sympathizing with the loser, who happens to be my enemy. There really is a streak of bourgeois pettiness in me. My vanity is scandalized because Monsieur de Rênal is a man—a member of that illustrious and enormous club to which I have the honor of belonging; I’m an idiot.

Monsieur Chélan had turned down all the offers of lodgings that the Liberals had hurried to make him once he had been thrown out of his position and had to leave the presbytery. The two rooms he had rented were cluttered with his books. Julien, desirous of showing Verrières just what a priest really was, went to his father’s and came back with a dozen planks of pinewood on his



back, carrying them that way all down the whole length of the main street. He borrowed some tools from an old friend, and he soon had built a kind of bookcase, in which he arranged Father Chélan's books.

"I thought you'd been corrupted by worldly vanities," the old man said, weeping with joy. "This certainly makes amends for your childish wearing that guard of honor uniform, which made you so many enemies."

Monsieur de Rênal had ordered Julien to live in his house in town. No one suspected what happened. The third day he was there, Julien saw coming up to his room no less a personage than the subprefect himself, Monsieur de Maugiron. It was only after two long hours of insipid conversation, with grand jeremiads against the wickedness of men, the lack of integrity among men charged with public affairs, the dangers facing our poor France, etc., etc., that Julien at last saw the point of the visit. They were already on the landing of the staircase and the poor, semidisgraced tutor was showing out—with all suitable respect—the future prefect of some fortunate département, when the latter turned to focus on Julien's career, and to applaud his moderation in material matters, etc., etc. At last, Monsieur de Maugiron took him in his arms in a most paternal embrace, proposing to him that he quit Monsieur de Rênal and come to work in the home of an official who had children who needed *educatin'*, and who, like King Philip, would come to thank heaven not so much for having given them to him but for having had them born in the neighborhood of Monsieur Julien.<sup>88</sup> Their tutor would enjoy a salary of eight hundred francs, payable not by the month, which was ignoble, said Monsieur de Maugiron, but by the quarter, and in advance.

It was now Julien's turn; for the last hour and a half, he had been waiting for the chance to speak. His response was perfect, and as lengthy as an encyclical; it implied everything while actually saying nothing. You would have heard in it at once respect for Monsieur de Rênal, a veneration for the people of Verrières, and gratitude to the illustrious subprefect. The said subprefect was startled to find someone even more Jesuitical than himself, and he sought vainly to get something more definite out of him. Julien, delighted with it all, took this

opportunity to exercise his skills, and so he started all over again, in different terms. Even the most oratorical minister of state, trying hard to monopolize the last hours of a parliamentary sitting while the members all seemed to be trying to wake up, never managed to say less in more words. Monsieur de Maugiron had barely left when Julien burst into wild laughter. To continue profiting from his Jesuitical verve, he sat down and drafted a nine-page letter to Monsieur de Rênal, in which he told him everything that had been said to him, and humbly asked for his advice. The scoundrel never actually told me the name of the person making the offer! It'll be Monsieur de Valenod, who sees my Verrières exile as having been caused by his anonymous letter.

Once his letter was dispatched, Julien, as pleased as a hunter coming out at six on a fine autumn morning and seeing before him a plain positively teeming with game, went out to seek advice from Monsieur Chélan. But before he arrived at the home of the good old curé, heaven, intent upon increasing all his joys, placed in his way Monsieur Valenod, from whom he by no means concealed the fact that his heart was torn in conflict. A poor boy like himself should devote himself exclusively to the vocation that heaven has implanted in his heart, but then one's vocation was not everything in this world. If he wanted to work worthily in the Lord's vineyards, and not be unworthy of associating with his learned collaborators, education was necessary; and an education required spending two very expensive years in the Besançon seminary. This in turn meant he would have to be thrifty and save his money, and this would certainly be easier to accomplish on a salary of eight hundred francs paid on a quarterly basis than it would be on one of six hundred, payable monthly. And yet on the other hand, heaven had placed him alongside the children of de Rênal, and caused to grow up within him a special attachment to them, and didn't that seem to indicate that it might turn out to be a mistake to abandon one form of education for another . . .

Julien had reached such a height of perfection in this style of discourse—which has come to replace the rapid action that characterized life under the Empire—that he found the sound of his own voice beginning to bore him.

When he returned, he found one of Monsieur Valenod's servants waiting for him, in full livery; the man had been looking all over town for him, with a letter of invitation to a dinner that same day.

Julien had never been to the man's home; only a few days ago, he thought of nothing else but how to find a way to give him a thorough beating without getting arrested for it afterward. Though the dinner was set for one o'clock, Julien thought it would be more respectful to arrive at twelve thirty and come to the study of the great director of the poorhouse. He found him positively emanating self-importance amid heaps of boxes for files. His huge black whiskers, his enormous quantity of hair, his *bonnet grec*<sup>89</sup> rakishly tilted on his head, his immense pipe, his embroidered slippers, the thick gold chains that crisscrossed his chest—all that apparel and paraphernalia of the provincial financier who imagines himself a ladies' man was not in the slightest impressive to Julien; he only fantasized all the more about beating the man with a cane.

He begged to have the honor of meeting Madame Valenod, but she was getting dressed and could not receive anyone. But in compensation, he had the benefit of witnessing the poorhouse director as he got dressed. Soon they went into the suite of Madame Valenod, who introduced him to her children, tears in her eyes. This lady, one of the most important in Verrières, had a heavy, masculine face, to which she had applied rouge for this grand occasion. She made sure her maternal feelings were on full display.

Julien thought about Madame de Rênal. He was so steeped in mistrust that he was rarely susceptible to the kind of memories that are aroused by contrasts, but in this case he was nearly moved to tears. That feeling was only intensified by the sight of the director's home. He was given a tour. Everything was magnificent and new, and they told him the price of every article. Julien felt there was something vile about it all, something that smelled of stolen money. The servants had an air of bold assurance about them, as if to insulate themselves from contempt.

The tax inspector, the man in charge of indirect taxes, the chief of the gendarmes, and two or three other public functionaries arrived, all with their wives.

They were followed by a few wealthy Liberals. Dinner was announced. Julien, already in a foul disposition, came to realize that right on the other side of the dining room wall were the wretched poorhouse inmates, whose food rations had probably been skimmed to pay for all this vulgar luxury that was supposed to dazzle him.

They might be going hungry at this very moment, he thought. His throat tightened; it was impossible to eat, almost impossible even to speak. It all got worse a quarter of an hour later; they could all hear, as if from far away, some fragments of a popular song, one that was, admittedly, a bit vulgar, being sung by one of the inmates. Monsieur Valenod glanced at one of his servants in full livery; the man disappeared, and soon no more singing could be heard. Just then a servant offered Julien some Rhine wine in a green glass, and Madame Valenod took care to let him know that this wine cost nine francs per bottle, purchased direct from the vineyard. Julien, holding his green glass, remarked to Monsieur Valenod:

“I don’t hear that vulgar song anymore.”

“And no wonder!” replied the director triumphantly. “I made sure the beggars were silenced.”

This was too much for Julien; he had their manners, but not yet the heart necessary for their station. Despite all his careful hypocrisy, so often and so skillfully practiced, he felt a tear trickle down his face.

He tried to hide it with the green glass, but it was out of the question for him to do proper honor to the Rhine wine. *Keeps the man from singing!* he exclaimed to himself. Oh my God—and you permit this.

Fortunately, no one noticed the bad taste his tear represented. The tax inspector began singing a Royalist tune. During the cacophony of the refrain, which everyone joined in singing: So this is it, Julien’s conscience was saying to him, the filthy fortune you’re going to acquire, and you’re going to get it only in these conditions, and only with people like these! You might get a position worth twenty thousand a year, but while you’re gorging yourself with meat, you’ll have to keep that prisoner from singing; you’ll give a fine dinner with the money you stole from his miserable pittance, and during that dinner he’ll be

more wretched than ever! Oh, Napoleon! How sweet it was in your era to rise up to a fortune by surviving the dangers of battle—but to increase that poor devil's suffering, and in so cowardly a manner!

I must admit that the weakness Julien showed in this monologue gives me a poor opinion of him. He could be a worthy associate of those conspirators in yellow gloves who try to reform the whole way of life in a great nation, and who don't want to get so much as a scratch from it.<sup>90</sup>

Julien abruptly remembered what his role was. He had not been invited to a dinner among such fine company just to dream and say nothing.

A retired manufacturer of painted cloth, a corresponding member of both the Academies of Besançon and Uzès, was speaking to him from the far end of the table, asking if it was true, what people said about his stunning accomplishments in the study of the New Testament.

A total silence fell at once; a Latin New Testament appeared, as if by magic, in the hands of the scholarly member of two academies. When Julien replied, a few words in Latin, randomly selected, were read out to him. He recited: his memory proved to be faithful, and the young prodigy was applauded with all the noisy energy common when a dinner comes to an end. Julien observed the glowing faces of the ladies; several of them were not bad. He noticed in particular the wife of the tax inspector who had sung so well.

"I'm ashamed, really, to be going on at such length in Latin before these ladies," he said, looking directly at her. "If Monsieur Rubigneau [this was the member of two academies] would be so good as to read out some Latin sentence at random, I'll try to improvise a translation of it."

This second proof of his prowess put the crown of glory on his reputation.

Present were a number of rich Liberals who, happy fathers of children competing for scholarships, were suddenly made converts after the most recent mission.<sup>91</sup> Fine political move that this was, it had not been enough to convince Monsieur de Rênal to receive them at his house. These worthy gentlemen, who knew Julien only by reputation and by having seen him on horseback on the day the king of \*\*\* came to town, were now his most fervent admirers. When will these dimwits get tired of listening to this biblical rhetoric that they

can't begin to fathom? he asked himself. But on the contrary: the strangeness of the style amused them; they laughed at it. Julien, however, was the one who got tired of it.

When six o'clock sounded, he rose up gravely, referring to a chapter in the new theology of Ligouri<sup>92</sup> that he had been assigned in order to recite it the following day to Monsieur Chélan. "You see, my work," he added cheerfully, "requires me to have others recite their lessons, and to recite my own as well."

Everyone laughed, everyone applauded: such is wit in Verrières. Julien was already standing, and now everyone else rose, despite decorum: such is the power of genius. Madame Valenod detained him for another quarter of an hour; he really had to hear the children recite their catechism; they made the funniest mistakes, and he was the only one who could appreciate them. He did nothing to correct them. What ignorance of the most fundamental principles of religion! he thought. At last he bowed and believed he was going to be allowed to leave, but now he had to listen to them try one of La Fontaine's fables.

"That author is quite immoral, you know," Julien said to Madame Valenod. "One of his fables, about Jean Chouart, heaps ridicule on everything that is most venerable. He is vigorously condemned by all the commentators."<sup>93</sup> Before he left, Julien received four or five invitations to dinner. "This young man is a credit to the département," the other guests were exclaiming, all of them in a state of high merriment. They went so far as to speak about establishing a pension from the city's funds to allow him to continue his studies in Paris.

As this rash idea was echoing around the dining room, Julien managed to steal away to the carriage entrance. Oh, what a rabble! A rabble! he muttered three or four times, taking pleasure in breathing in the fresh air.

And right at that moment he felt as if he were a true aristocrat—he who, for such a long time, had been offended by the disdainful smile and the haughty superiority he detected lurking behind all Monsieur de Rênal's polite interactions with him. He couldn't help but feel the extreme difference. Let's forget for the moment, he said to himself as he walked along, that the money was stolen from the impoverished inmates, and even that they were forbidden to sing! Never did Monsieur de Rênal think it was a fine idea to tell his guests the

price of every bottle of wine he served them. And this Monsieur Valenod, in listing out all the things he owns, which he does endlessly, dare not say “my house,” “my property,” etc., if his wife is around, because then he’d better say “your house,” “your property.”

That lady, apparently so keenly aware of the pleasure of owning property, had just made an abominable scene during the dinner when one of the servants broke a glass, *ruining one of her sets of twelve*; and the servant had replied with extreme insolence.

What a crowd! thought Julien. Even if they were to give me half the money they steal, I wouldn’t agree to go live with them. One fine day, I’d be unable to hide it any longer; I’d have to let the contempt I feel for them show.

But he had to follow the plan laid out by Madame de Rênal and attend several dinners just like this one. Julien was all the rage; they pardoned him for his guard of honor uniform, or rather, that piece of impudence turned out to be the catalyst of his success. Soon the only question in Verrières was simply who would win the battle to secure the services of this young man, whether Monsieur de Rênal or the director of the poorhouse. Those two gentlemen along with Monsieur Maslon formed a triumvirate that had tyrannized over the town for quite a few years. People felt jealous of the mayor, and the Liberals had plenty to complain about concerning him; but after all, he was a nobleman and thus destined for superiority, whereas the father of Monsieur Valenod had not bequeathed him an income of six hundred livres. Instead, his lot was to have passed from the pity everyone used to feel for the apple-green suit he wore as a boy, which everyone remembered, to being envied for his Norman horses, his gold chains, and his clothes ordered direct from Paris—in short, for all his current affluence.

In the hubbub of this world, so new to Julien, he thought he had discovered a decent man; this was a geometrician named Gros, who passed for a Jacobin.<sup>94</sup> Julien, who had vowed never to say anything except what he believed to be false, therefore had to adopt a suspicious attitude toward Monsieur Gros. He received thick packets of homework exercises from Vergy. He was advised to visit his father frequently, and he did carry out that miserable task. In a word,

he was fully repairing his reputation, when one morning he was highly surprised to be awakened by a pair of hands over his eyes.

They were Madame de Rênal's; she had come to the town and, rushing up the stairs four steps at a time, leaving the children busy with a much-favored rabbit they had brought along, bounded into Julien's room just a moment before them. The moment was delicious, but very brief: Madame de Rênal had disappeared by the time the children arrived with the rabbit, wanting to show it to their friend. Julien welcomed them all warmly, even the rabbit. He felt he had his family back; he felt he loved those children, felt it was pleasant to chatter with them. He was surprised at the sweetness of their voices, the simplicity and the nobility of their little ways; he needed to wash his imagination clean from all the vulgar ways of doing things, from all the unpleasant thoughts he had to breathe in here in Verrières. The fear of want was never far away; luxury and poverty were always tearing at each other. The people he was dining with made humiliating confidences to him about the roast meat on their table—humiliating to them and sickening to the listeners.

"You nobles, you have reason to be proud," he said to Madame de Rênal. And he told her about the dinners he had had to endure.

"Ah, you're in fashion then!" And she laughed heartily, thinking about the rouge that Madame Valenod thought she had to apply every time Julien was around. "I suspect her of designs on your affections," she added.

Their luncheon was pure pleasure. The presence of the children, although seemingly a nuisance, actually enhanced the general happiness. The poor children didn't know how they might express their joy at seeing Julien again. The servants did not fail to tell them that he was being offered two hundred francs extra for *educatin'* the little Valenods.

In the middle of their meal, Stanislas-Xavier, still pale from his serious illness, suddenly asked his mother how much his silverware and cup were worth.

"Why do you ask?"

"I want to sell them and give the money to Julien, so he won't be a *sucker* if he stays with us."

Julien embraced the boy, tears in his eyes. His mother wept openly while



Julien, who had taken Stanislas on his knees, explained to him that he shouldn't use the word sucker, that it was a word fit for lackeys. Seeing how much pleasure he was giving Madame de Rênal, he tried to find some vivid examples of what it was to be a sucker, which amused the children.

"I understand," said Stanislas. "It's like the silly crow who drops his cheese, and then the fox picks it up, the one who was the flatterer."

Madame de Rênal, wild with joy, covered her children with kisses, which could not be accomplished without leaning up against Julien.

Just then the door opened; it was Monsieur de Rênal. His severe, unhappy expression made a strong contrast with the gentle happiness that his presence dissipated. Madame de Rênal went pale; she felt she would not have the strength to deny anything. Julien was first to speak, and in a loud voice he began telling the mayor the story about the silver cup that Stanislas wanted to sell. He was certain that this tale would be ill received. Monsieur de Rênal frowned out of habit at the very mention of silver. The very use of the word, he always said, is a ploy to make some demand upon my money.

But in this case it was more than a matter of money; the scene had augmented his suspicions. The atmosphere of happiness making his family so lively in his absence was not the kind of thing calculated to improve matters with a man of such sensitive vanity. As his wife went on to praise the graceful, clever way Julien had seized the moment to instruct his pupils in new ideas:

"Yes, yes! I know! He makes me odious to my children. It's quite easy for him to be a hundred times more amiable than I who, after all, am the master. Everything in this century of ours tends to paint *legitimate* authority as odious. Oh, our poor France!"

Madame de Rênal didn't pause to consider the shades of implication in her husband's way of reacting. She had just caught a glimpse of the reality of spending twelve hours in Julien's company. She had a great deal of shopping to do while in town, and she declared positively that she wanted to have dinner in a cabaret, and she stuck to the idea regardless of anything her husband did or said. The children were in ecstasy at the very word *cabaret*, which our modern prudery pronounces with such pleasure.<sup>95</sup>

Monsieur de Rênal left his wife in the first dry goods shop she entered in order to pay some visits. He returned more irritable than he had been in the morning; he was sure the whole town was talking about nothing but him and Julien. But in fact, nobody had given him any reason to suspect that there was any nasty gossip going around. What people did talk about to the mayor was strictly confined to whether Julien would remain with him, at six hundred francs, or accept the eight hundred offered by the director of the poorhouse.

That director, when he encountered Monsieur de Rênal in society, *gave him the cold shoulder*. This behavior was not too casually done; casual, thoughtless behavior is rare in the provinces. Feelings are such rare phenomena there that they are deeply suppressed.

Monsieur Valenod was what would be called, a hundred leagues from Paris, a *poseur*; the term suggests the type who combines boldness with vulgarity. His triumphant post-1815 existence had only confirmed him in this fine disposition. He reigned, so to speak, in Verrières at the pleasure of Monsieur de Rênal; but he hustled about much more, blushed at nothing, meddled in everything, endlessly coming and going, writing, speaking, forgetting every little humiliation, having no personal agenda, and, in the end, surpassing his master in terms of reputation and influence in the eyes of the ecclesiastics. Monsieur Valenod had more or less said to the town grocers, “give me your two biggest fools”; to the lawyers, “show me your two most ignorant”; and to the health officers, “give me your two worst charlatans.” And when he had assembled the worst people from each profession, he said to them all, “Let’s reign together.”

The way these people operated annoyed Monsieur de Rênal. But Monsieur Valenod was too vulgar himself to be offended by anything, even when the little Abbé Maslon contradicted him in public.

Despite all his prosperity, however, Monsieur Valenod had to defend himself, by means of some little moments of outright impudence, against the harsh truths about himself that people were entitled to bring up at times, and he knew this very well. He had redoubled all his bustling in the wake of Monsieur Apert’s visit, and indeed he made three separate trips to Besançon. He wrote sev-

eral letters for every post, and he sent off others via strangers who stopped by his place at nightfall. Maybe it had been a bad move to have old Father Chélan removed from his position; that vindictive act of his resulted in a number of pious ladies of respectable birth deciding that he was a deeply wicked man. Besides, doing this service had put him in a position of being completely dependent upon the vicar-general, Monsieur de Frilair, from whom he received strange orders. His scheming had reached this point when he decided he would allow himself the pleasure of writing an anonymous letter. To worsen his embarrassment, his wife declared to him that it was her wish to have Julien come with them; her vanity was piqued by the idea.

In this situation, Monsieur Valenod could foresee a final rupture coming with his old associate Monsieur de Rênal. The latter would address some harsh words to him, but that didn't bother him; however, he could decide to write to Besançon, even to Paris. Some cousin of some minister could show up all of a sudden in Verrières and take over the poorhouse. Monsieur Valenod considered enlisting the help of the Liberals: that was why a number of them had been present at the dinner where Julien did his recitations. They could give him powerful support against the mayor. But elections would come eventually, and there was no doubt that nobody could both maintain the poorhouse position and vote for the wrong party. The whole story of this elaborate scheming had been cleverly divined by Madame de Rênal, and she now passed it on to Julien as he offered her his arm, passing from shop to shop and arriving eventually at the Cours de la Fidélité, where they spent several hours that were almost as calm and serene as those at Vergy.

Meanwhile, Monsieur Valenod was trying to evade coming to a final break with his old boss by adopting a not-quite impudent stance toward him. The tactic was successful that day, but it only worsened the mayor's bad mood.

Never had vanity in conflict with the love of money, in all its bitter, shabby aspects, ever put a man in a more pathetic state than that in which Monsieur de Rênal now found himself as he entered the cabaret. And never, on the other hand, had his children been more joyous and cheerful. The contrast only served to irritate him.

“So, I’m not welcome in my own family, as I can plainly see!” he said, in a tone that he hoped was threatening.

His wife’s response was to take him aside and urge on him the need to be rid of Julien. These hours of happiness that she had just shared with him had given her new strength and confidence in carrying out the plan she had been meditating for the past two weeks. The thing that really bothered the poor mayor of Verrières was knowing that people publicly made jokes about his attachment to his *cash*. Monsieur Valenod, like many thieves, was generous, whereas the mayor had conducted himself all too prudently when it came to the last five or six charitable campaigns for the Confraternity of St. Joseph, the Congregation of the Virgin, the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament, etc., etc.

Among the gentlemen of Verrières and its surrounding region whose names were cleverly listed on the brothers’ registers in order of the size of their contributions, people had noticed more than once that Monsieur de Rênal’s name appeared toward the bottom. It was in vain to protest that in his office he *took no salary*. Such things are not joking matters to the clergy.

## 23

# THE SORROWS OF A CIVIL SERVANT

The pleasure of being able to hold your head high year-round is worth the price of having to endure one or two difficult quarters of an hour.

CASTI<sup>96</sup>

But let us leave the little man in the grip of his little fears. Why did he take a man of some spirit into his house when what he wanted was one with the soul of a valet? Why isn’t he better at choosing his servants? The normal way things

are done in the nineteenth century is that when a powerful, noble creature encounters a man of spirit, he kills him, exiles him, imprisons him, or humiliates him so that the other ends up fool enough to die of grief. But as it happens, in this case, it's not the man of spirit who suffers. The great misfortune both of small towns in France and those with elected governments, like New York, is that they can never forget that the world contains such people as Monsieur de Rênal. In a town of twenty thousand inhabitants, such men form public opinion, and public opinion is a terrible thing in a country that has a charter. A man born with a soul that is noble and generous, who could have been your friend if only he didn't live a hundred leagues away, judges you according to the public opinion of your town, which is shaped by fools whom chance has made noble, wealthy, and moderate. Woe to anyone who stands out in any way!

Immediately after dinner, they left to return to Vergy; but two days later, Julien saw the whole family return to Verrières.

Less than an hour had passed when Julien, to his great confusion, realized that Madame de Rênal was up to something mysterious. She broke off her conversations with her husband the minute he appeared and seemed to wish he weren't there. Julien did not have to see such behavior twice. He turned cold and reserved; Madame de Rênal saw it and didn't ask for any explanation. Does she already have someone lined up to succeed me? he wondered. The day before yesterday, she was so intimate with me! But they say that's the way these great ladies are. They're like kings: no one gets greater attention than the minister who finds, when he goes home that evening, that he's fallen into disgrace.

Julien noticed that the conversations that were always broken off when he approached often seemed to be making reference to a large house that belonged to the municipality of Verrières; it was old, but very large and convenient, situated right across from the church, in the commercial center of the town. Julien wondered, what connection could there be between that house and a new lover? In his frustration, he repeated to himself the clever lines by François I, which seemed new to him because he had only learned about them the month before, from Madame de Rênal. How many vows, how many caresses had seemed to prove the lines were false!

Women change, that's the rule;  
The man who trusts one is a fool.<sup>97</sup>

Monsieur de Rênal set off by post horse for Besançon. The trip had been decided upon in less than two hours, and he seemed extremely agitated. Upon his return, he tossed a big bundle wrapped in gray paper on the table.

"There it is, this idiotic business," he said to his wife.

An hour later, Julien saw the billsticker come and carry off the bundle with him; he quickly followed him. I'll know what this is all about by the time we reach the first street corner.

He waited impatiently, following behind the billsticker, who was applying paste to the back of the poster with his thick brush. The minute it was up on the wall, Julien's curiosity was sated to read the announcement, in detail, of the upcoming public auction of the lease on the big old house that had come up so often in the conversations between Monsieur de Rênal and his wife. The auction was to be held the following day, at two o'clock, in the city hall, and the bidding would last until the third candle had burned down. Julien was quite disappointed, because he thought the deadline was too soon: how could all the people who might bid find out in time? Apart from this, the poster—which was dated two weeks back, and which he read over again with care in three different places—gave him no further information.

He went to have a look at the house up for leasing. The porter, not seeing him arrive, was saying mysteriously to a neighbor:

"Bah! It's a waste of time. Monsieur Maslon promised him he could have it for three hundred francs. And when the mayor flinched at that, the vicar-general ordered him to go to the bishop."

Julien's arrival seemed to fluster the two friends, and they said nothing more.

Julien made sure to come observe the auction. There was a crowd in the dimly lit hall; everyone there was surreptitiously looking everyone else over. All eyes were fixed on a table, upon which Julien could see a tin plate holding three candle stubs. The auctioneer was calling out:

*"Three hundred francs, gentlemen!"*

“Three hundred francs! That’s a laugh,” said a man quietly to his neighbor. Julien stood between them. “It’s worth more than eight hundred. I’m going to up the bid.”

“You’re spitting into the wind. What’s the good of making enemies out of Monsieur Maslon, Monsieur Valenod, the bishop, the vicar-general, and that whole set?”

“Three hundred twenty francs!” called out the first man.

“It’s just stupid!” said his neighbor. “And look—here’s one of the mayor’s spies,” he added, indicating Julien.

Julien turned sharply to pay him back for saying that, but the two Franche-Comté locals paid no attention to him. Their self-possession helped him regain his own. Just then, the third candle end went out, and the auctioneer’s drawling voice was awarding the house for a nine-year lease to Monsieur de Saint-Giraud, chief clerk at the prefecture of <sup>\*\*\*</sup>, for the sum of three hundred thirty francs.

As soon as the mayor had left the hall, the gossip started up. “Well, that’s thirty francs that Grogeot’s impudence earned for the town,” said one. “Oh, but Monsieur de Saint-Giraud,” another replied, “will get his revenge on Grogeot. He’ll figure out a way to pass the cost on.”

“How sordid the whole thing is!” a fat man on Julien’s left was saying. “A house like that, I’d have given eight hundred francs and used it as my factory, and it would’ve been a bargain too.”

“Bah!” a young Liberal manufacturer exclaimed. “Isn’t Monsieur de Saint-Giraud in with the Congrégation? His four children—don’t they all have scholarships? The poor man! The town of Verrières simply must supplement his income with an added five hundred francs. That’s just the way things are.”

A third man remarked, “And to think that the mayor couldn’t prevent it! After all, he’s an Ultra, and he was among the first. But he isn’t a thief.”

“Not a thief?” replied another. “No, but he’s got flunkies, and they do his stealing for him. And then it all goes into one big purse, and they share it out among themselves at the end of the year. But look—it’s that young Sorel. Let’s get out of here.”

Julien came home in low spirits; he found Madame de Rênal just as depressed.

“You’ve been to the auction?” she asked him.

“Yes, Madame, and I’ve had the honor of being taken for one of the mayor’s spies.”

“If he had listened to me, he’d have been out of town today.”

Just then, Monsieur de Rênal entered; he was quite somber. Not a word was spoken at dinner. Monsieur de Rênal ordered Julien to take the children to Vergy; the trip there was gloomy. Madame de Rênal consoled her husband:

“Surely you must be used to it, my friend.”

That evening, they all sat wordlessly around the hearth; the sounds the burning beech logs made were the only things breaking the silence. It was one of those moments of sadness that even the most harmonious families sometimes go through. But then, one of the children called out excitedly:

“Someone’s ringing at the door! Someone’s ringing at the door!”

“Damn it! If it’s Monsieur de Saint-Giraud coming to twist the knife by thinking he should thank me,” exclaimed the mayor, “I’m going to tell him off. I can’t take any more. Valenod is the one he should thank, and I’m the one who’s been compromised. What am I going to say if those wretched Jacobin newspapers get hold of this little tale, and turn me into a Monsieur Eighty-Fifteen?”<sup>98</sup>

As he said this, a fine-looking man with thick black whiskers was following a servant into the room.

“Monsieur Mayor, I am Signor Géronimo.”<sup>99</sup> Here is a letter that Monsieur le Chevalier de Beauvoisis, who is attaché at the embassy in Naples, gave me when I left—which was just nine days ago,” added Signor Géronimo with a cheerful air as he looked at Madame de Rênal. “The Signor de Beauvoisis, your cousin, and my good friend, Madame, tells me that you know Italian.”

The good humor of the Neapolitan transformed the somber evening into a completely cheerful one. Madame de Rênal insisted on giving him a supper. She made the whole house suddenly energetic; she was especially keen to



create a distraction for Julien, for whom the term “spy,” which he had heard applied to him twice that day, continued ringing in his ear. Signor Geronimo was a famous singer, good company, and vigorously cheerful, qualities that in France are rarely found together. He sang, after the supper, a little *duettino* with Madame de Rênal. He told charming stories. At one in the morning, the children howled in protest when Julien suggested they go to bed.

“Just this one last story,” said the eldest.

“Then it will be my story, my signorino,” replied Signor Geronimo. “Eight years ago I was, like you, a young student at the Naples conservatory. I mean, I was your age, but I did not, unlike you, have the honor of being the son of the illustrious mayor of Verrières.” The phrase made Monsieur de Rênal sigh, and he looked over at his wife.

“Now, Signor Zingarelli,” the young singer went on, exaggerating his accent a little to amuse the children, “this Signor Zingarelli is an exceptionally severe master.<sup>100</sup> He isn’t much liked at the conservatory, but he wants people to act as if they like him. I went out as often as I could. I used to go to the little San Carlino Theater, where I heard music like the gods would make, but, oh heavens!—how could I scrape together the eight sous it cost to get into the pit? An enormous sum,” he exclaimed, looking at the children, who burst out into laughter. “Signor Giovannone, the director of the San Carlino, heard me sing. I was sixteen. ‘This boy is a treasure,’ he said.

“‘Would you like to come work for me, my dear boy?’ he came over and said to me.

“‘And how much would you pay me?’

“‘Forty ducats a month.’ My friends, that’s sixty francs. I thought I’d died and gone to heaven.

“‘But how,’ I asked Giovannone, ‘am I going to get Zingarelli to let me go?’

“‘*Lascia fare a me.*’”

“That means leave it to me!” cried the eldest boy.

“Exactly, my young lordship. This Signor Giovannone said to me: ‘*Caro*, first a little contract.’ I signed it, and he gave me three ducats. I’d never seen so much money. Then he told me what I should do.

“The next day, I asked to see the terrible Signor Zingarelli. His aged valet told me to come in.

“‘What do you want with me, you wretched pupil?’ said Zingarelli.

“‘Maestro,’ I said to him, ‘I am sorry for all my failings. I promise I will never again break out of the conservatory by climbing over the iron gate. I’m going to study harder than ever.’

“‘If I weren’t afraid of ruining the finest bass voice I’ve ever heard, I’d throw you into a cell on bread and water for a couple of weeks, you little rogue.’

“‘Maestro,’ I continued, ‘I want to be a model for the whole school, *credete a me*. But I want to ask you for one favor: if anyone comes to ask me to sing outside the conservatory, say you won’t let me go. Please say you won’t let me.’

“‘And what kind of devil do you imagine would be interested in a little hoodlum like you? Do you really think I’ll ever permit you to leave the conservatory? Are you trying to make a fool of me? Get out—get out!’ he shouted, trying to land a kick on my backside. ‘Watch out, or it’s bread and water in prison.’

“So an hour later, here comes Signor Giovannone into the director’s office.

“‘I’ve come to ask you to make my fortune,’ he said. ‘Let me have Geronimo. If he comes to sing at my theater, I’ll be able to marry off my daughter this winter.’

“‘What are you going to do with that miserable rogue?’ asked Zingarelli. ‘I don’t want him to go. You can’t have him. And anyway, even if I did consent, he’ll never agree to leave the conservatory. He just swore it to me.’

“‘Well, if it’s only his willingness that’s the issue,’ said Giovannone gravely, pulling my contract out of his pocket, ‘*carte canta!*’<sup>101</sup> Here’s his signature.’

“With that, Zingarelli flew into a fury and rang the bell: ‘Have Geronimo thrown out of the conservatory,’ he cried, seething with rage. And so they threw me out, me laughing the whole time. That same night I sang the aria, *del Moltiplico*. Pulcinella wants to marry, and he counts off on his fingers the things he’ll need in his household, and he keeps losing count over and over.”<sup>102</sup>

“Oh, please, monsieur, sing it for us now,” said Madame de Rênal.

Geronimo sang, and everyone laughed so hard there were tears in their eyes.

Signor G ronimo didn't go to bed until two in the morning, leaving the whole family delighted with his manners, his affability, and his gaiety.

The next day, Monsieur and Madame de R nal gave him the letters he would need for his introduction at the French court.

So it's falsehood everywhere, thought Julien. There goes Signor G ronimo on his way to London with sixty thousand francs worth of engagements. If it hadn't been for the perceptiveness of the San Carlino director, his divine voice might only have become known and admired maybe ten years later . . . I swear, I'd rather be a G ronimo than a R nal. He has less prestige in society, but he doesn't have the misery of having to grant leases like the one yesterday, and he has some gaiety in his life.

One thing astonished Julien: those solitary weeks he had passed in Verri res, in the house of Monsieur de R nal, had been an interlude of real happiness for him. He only experienced disgust and sad thoughts at those dinners he had had to attend; but in that empty house, wasn't he free to read, to write, to think, without any anxieties? He was not wrenched away from his brilliant reveries every minute by the cruel necessity of keeping an eye on all the petty movements of a base soul, and then by the necessity of finding ways to deceive it, either by some action or some hypocritical words.

Could happiness be that close? . . . Such a life wouldn't cost much at all: I could choose to marry Mademoiselle  lisa, or accept Fouqu 's offer of a partnership . . . But a traveler makes his way up a steep mountain and when he reaches the peak, sits down and finds perfect pleasure just in resting. Would I stay happy if I were forced to rest like that every day?

Meanwhile, Madame de R nal was oppressed by darker thoughts. Despite her resolution, she had gone ahead and revealed the whole shady story of the leased building to Julien. And he'll probably go on making me forget all my vows! she thought.

She would have sacrificed her life without hesitation if it would save that of her husband, if she had seen him in peril. Hers was a noble, romantic soul, one for whom seeing the possibility of a generous act and failing to carry it through

would be as great a source of remorse as the commission of an actual crime. She often had gloomy days when she simply couldn't escape the image of the extreme happiness she would enjoy if she were suddenly to become a widow and were free to marry Julien.

He loved her children much more than their father did; despite his severe discipline, they adored him. She knew perfectly well that if she married Julien she would have to leave Vergy, whose shady places were so dear to her. She pictured herself living in Paris, continuing to give her sons that education that everyone admired so. Her children, she herself, Julien—they would all be perfectly happy.

What a strange effect of marriage, at least what the nineteenth century has made of it! The boredom of married life inevitably makes love wither away, if there even had been any love before the marriage. But at the same time, a philosopher might say, it very quickly induces in people who have enough money not to need to work an enormous boredom with all the calmer pleasures in life. And among women, this boredom predisposes all but the most dried-up souls to love.

This philosophical reflection leads me to pardon Madame de Rênal, but no one was pardoning her in Verrières, where indeed the whole town was preoccupied with the scandal of her love affair. It made the autumn much less boring than usual for the town's inhabitants.

That autumn, and part of that winter, passed quickly. They had to leave the forests of Vergy. The better levels of society in Verrières were getting indignant that their anathemas seemed to be producing so little effect on Monsieur de Rênal. The first week had not passed before certain grave individuals added a little spice to their solemnity by the pleasure of carrying out their missions of suggesting the cruelest suspicions to him, but without ever using even remotely indecorous language.

Monsieur Valenod, who was playing a risky game carefully, had got Élisabeth a place in a noble, well-respected family, in which there were five women. Élisabeth, fearing, she said, that she wouldn't find a place that winter, had asked the family for only about two-thirds of what she had been getting at the mayor's home.

On her own she conceived the excellent idea of going to confession both to the one-time curé Chélan and to the new one as well, in order to be sure each was fully informed about Julien's love affair.

The day after her arrival, at six in the morning, Father Chélan sent for Julien.

"I'm not asking you anything," he said, "and I beg you—no, I order you—not to tell me anything. But I insist that within three days you depart for the seminary at Besançon, or for the place of your friend Fouqué, who's still willing to offer you a splendid situation. I've taken care of everything, arranged everything, but you have to leave, and you must stay away from Verrières for at least a year."

Julien made no reply; he was determining whether his honor demanded that he be offended by the efforts Monsieur Chélan—who after all was not his father—had made for him.

"Tomorrow, at this same time, I'll have the honor of speaking with you again," he said at last.

Father Chélan, who was counting heavily on having a powerful influence over such a young man, went on speaking at length. Julien maintained an outward appearance of the utmost humility and said not a word.

Finally he got away and went directly to tell Madame de Rênal, whom he found sunk in despair. Her husband had just been speaking with her, with a certain degree of frankness. The natural weakness in his character, combined with the prospect of the Besançon inheritance, led him to decide to treat her as if she were entirely innocent. He had just admitted to her the strange state of public opinion he had found in Verrières. Clearly the public was wrong, having been deceived by those who envied him, but what were they to do?

For a moment, Madame de Rênal entertained the illusion that Julien might accept the offer from Valenod and continue to live in Verrières. But the simple, shy woman she had been only a year ago was gone now; her fatal passion and her remorse had enlightened her. And now she had to face the sorrowful reality, even as she listened to her husband, that a separation, at least for the time being, was unavoidable. When he's far away from me, Julien is going to lapse

back into those grand ambitious schemes that come naturally to a person who has nothing. But as for me, good God! I have so much, I'm so rich, and it's all useless when it comes to my own happiness. He'll forget me. He's so attractive, he'll be loved, and he'll love in return. Oh, how miserable I am . . . But what am I complaining about? Heaven is just: I didn't have the strength to put an end to my sin; it added my judgment. All I had to do was win Élisabeth over with some money. Nothing would have been easier. I didn't pause and think, even for a moment. These mad love fantasies took up all my time. It's all over for me.

Julien was struck by one thing in particular: when he brought the terrible news of his departure to Madame de Rênal, she made no selfish objections. She was evidently making an effort not to cry.

"We need to be strong, my friend." She cut off a lock of her hair. "I don't know what I'm going to do," she said, "but if I die, promise me you won't forget my children. Whether you're far or near, try to see that they grow up to be decent people. If there's a new revolution, all the nobles will have their throats cut, and their father will probably emigrate, maybe because of that peasant who was killed on the roof. Watch over the family . . . Give me your hand. Farewell, my friend! These are our last moments. Once this great sacrifice is made, I'll find the courage to see to my reputation."

Julien had expected despair. The simplicity of her farewell moved him.

"No, I don't accept this farewell of yours. I'll leave—they want me to, and you yourself want it. But three days later, I'll come back and visit you at night."

With that, Madame de Rênal's entire existence changed. Julien did love her, then, since he was the one to come up with the idea of seeing her again! Her dreadful grief changed at once into one of the most sweeping thrills of joy she had ever experienced. Everything looked easy now. The certainty of seeing her lover again removed all the terrible pain from these final moments together. From that moment, both the conduct and the countenance of Madame de Rênal became noble, strong, and perfectly respectable.

Soon Monsieur de Rênal came in; he was beside himself. He was soon telling his wife about the anonymous letter he had received two months before.

“I want to take it with me to the Casino, to show everybody what that wretched Valenod really is, the man I raised up out of obscurity and turned into one of the richest bourgeois in Verrières. I want to shame him publicly, and then fight a duel with him. This is just too much.”

Good God, I could end up a widow! thought Madame de Rênal, but she immediately said to herself:

If I don’t prevent this duel, which I certainly can, I’ll be guilty of my husband’s murder.

Never had she managed his vanity more skillfully. It took her less than two hours to get him to see, using arguments that he seemed to have come up with himself, that he really must be friendlier than ever to Monsieur Valenod, and that he must even hire Élisabeth back. Madame de Rênal needed courage to decide to see that girl again, the cause of all her misfortunes. But the idea had originated with Julien.

Finally, after having been put on the track three or four times, Monsieur de Rênal arrived all by himself at the idea—though it was financially painful for him to accept—that the worst thing for him would be for Julien to stay in Verrières as tutor to Valenod’s children, considering how the town was already aboil with gossip. Obviously, it was in Julien’s best interests to accept the offer from the director of the poorhouse. But on the other hand, it would best redound to the good reputation of Monsieur de Rênal for Julien to enter either the seminary in Besançon or the one in Dijon. But how could he be coaxed into it, and, moreover, what would he live on while there?

Monsieur de Rênal, sensing the imminence of a financial sacrifice, was in deeper despair than his wife. As for her, after this conversation she was in a position similar to that of the bighearted man who, tired of life, has taken a dose of *stramonium*; he exerts no further effort, so to speak, and takes no further interest in anything.<sup>103</sup> This is the state to which Louis XIV arrived when he was dying and would refer to “the days when I was king.” What a fine phrase!

First thing the next morning, Monsieur de Rênal received an anonymous letter. This one was couched in the most insulting style. The foulest terms applicable to his situation leaped out of every line. It was the work of some envious

subordinate. The letter reawakened in him the idea of dueling Monsieur Valenod. Soon his courage had swollen to the point that he began to take immediate action. He went out alone to the gunsmith to procure pistols, which he had the man load.

And even if, he said to himself, we were to return to the strict regime under the Emperor Napoleon, no one could accuse me of having misappropriated a sou. At the worst, I've shut my eyes to certain things, but I have valid letters in my desk that authorized me to do so.

Madame de Rênal was frightened by her husband's cold anger, and the fatal idea of widowhood arose again, unstopably. She closeted herself with him. She talked to him for several hours, but in vain; the new anonymous letter had decided him. Eventually she succeeded in rerouting the courage to go strike Monsieur Valenod into that of offering Julien six hundred francs to support him for a year at the seminary. Monsieur de Rênal cursed a thousand times over the day he'd had the fatal idea of taking a tutor into his home and forgot about the anonymous letter.

He found a little consolation in an idea that he kept from his wife: with a little skill, and counting on the young man's romantic notions, he hoped to get him to agree to refuse Monsieur Valenod's offer for a lesser sum.

Madame de Rênal found it more difficult to convince Julien that, since he was helping her husband out by refusing the sum of eight hundred francs, which the poorhouse director was offering him publicly, he should have no ethical qualms about accepting compensation.

"But," Julien said repeatedly, "I never, not even for an instant, planned to accept that offer. You've made me too accustomed to an elegant life, and the vulgarity of those people would be the death of me."

Cruel necessity, with its iron hand, broke down Julien's willpower. His pride created for him the illusion that to accept this money from the mayor of Verrières was simply to accept a loan, and he wrote out a note, promising to repay the amount with interest within five years.

Madame de Rênal still had some thousands of francs hidden up in the little cave in the mountain.



Trembling, she offered the money to him, knowing too well that he would refuse angrily.

“Are you trying,” Julien said, “to turn the memory of our love into something disgusting?”

At last, Julien left Verrières. Monsieur de Rênal was very pleased, because at the critical moment when Julien would have to accept money from him, the sacrifice felt too great. He refused it altogether. Monsieur de Rênal threw his arms around him, tears in his eyes. Julien had asked him for a letter of reference, and in the enthusiasm of the moment he could not find words that would sufficiently praise the young man’s conduct. Our hero had saved six louis and was counting on asking Fouqué for a similar sum.

He felt deeply moved. But by the time he was a league away from Verrières, where he was leaving behind so much love, he could only think about how much he was going to enjoy seeing the capital, a great military city like Besançon.

During the brief absence of three days, Madame de Rênal fell victim to one of love’s cruelest deceptions. Life was tolerable, for between her and the depths of misery there was the thought of this final meeting with Julien. She counted the hours, the minutes, that separated them. Finally, during the evening of the third day, she could hear the distant signal they had arranged. After having surmounted a thousand dangers, Julien now appeared before her.

At that moment, she had but one thought: This is the last time I’ll see him. Far from responding to her lover’s attentions, she was like a corpse, only barely alive. If she did force herself to say she loved him, it came out with so awkward an air that it seemed to prove the contrary. Nothing could distract her from the cruel thought of an eternal separation. The distrustful Julien thought he had already been forgotten. When he dropped hints in that regard, she responded only with great tears, rolling down in silence, and almost convulsive squeezes of his hands.

“But great God! How do you expect me to believe you?” Julien replied to his lover’s cold protests. “You’d be a hundred times more sincere about your friendship with Madame Derville, and she’s only an acquaintance.”

Madame de Rênal, petrified, couldn't think of what to say.

"It's impossible to be any more miserable than this . . . I only hope I can die . . . I feel my heart turning to ice . . ."

Such were the fullest responses he could get out of her.

When daybreak approached and he would have to depart, those tears of Madame de Rênal came to a halt. She watched him fix a knotted rope to the window without saying anything at all, without even kissing him. Julien said to her, in vain:

"We've come to the moment you longed for. From now on, you can live your life without remorse. When one of your children comes down with the slightest illness, you won't have to imagine him being laid in the grave."

"I'm sorry that you can't kiss Stanislas goodbye," she said, coldly.

Julien in the end was powerfully struck by the cold embraces of that living corpse; he could hardly think of anything else for several leagues. His spirit was plunged in regret, and before he crossed the mountain, for as long as he could make out the clock tower of Verrières, he kept looking back.

## 24

# A CAPITAL

*So much noise, so many busy people! So many  
ideas about the future running through the head of a  
twenty-year-old! What a powerful distraction from love!*

**BARNAVE**

Eventually he caught sight, on a distant mountain, of black city walls: it was the fortress town of Besançon. How different things would have been for me, he thought with a sigh, if I were coming into this noble military city to be a sub-lieutenant in one of the regiments tasked with its defense!

Besançon is not only one of France's prettiest towns; it is filled with warm-hearted, intelligent people. But Julien was nothing more than a little peasant, and he had no means of coming into contact with distinguished men.

He had borrowed a suit of bourgeois clothes from Fouqué, and it was in that guise that he crossed over the drawbridge. His head abuzz with the history of the siege of 1674, he wanted to see, before shutting himself up in the seminary, the ramparts and the citadel. Two or three times he was on the point of being arrested by the sentries; he was trying to get into places from which the public was barred, so that the authorities could manage the sale of ten or fifteen francs' worth of hay every year.

The height of the walls, the depth of the moats, the fearsome look of the cannons had kept him fascinated for several hours, when he found himself passing in front of the great café on the boulevard. He stopped and stared in admiration; even though he could clearly read the word *CAFÉ* written in big characters up above the two immense doors, he could scarcely believe his eyes. He made an effort to conquer his timidity, and he dared to enter the place, finding himself within a room that stretched some thirty or forty feet in length, with a ceiling that must have been at least twenty feet high. On this day, everything was magical for him.

There were two different billiard games in progress. Waiters called out the scores; the players moved around the tables, elbowing their way through the onlookers. Clouds of tobacco smoke, puffing out of everyone's mouth, enveloped the scene in a haze of blue. The tall stature of these men, their rounded shoulders, their broad whiskers, the long frock coats covering their bodies—all of it captured Julien's attention. These noble children of the ancient *Bisontium*<sup>104</sup> seemed to shout rather than speak; they all had the look of terrifying warriors. Julien stood still, admiring; he was thinking of the immensity and the magnificence of a great capital such as Besançon. He totally lacked the courage it would have taken to order a cup of coffee from one of those gentlemen with the haughty air who were calling out the billiard scores.

But the girl at the counter had observed the charming looks of the country bourgeois who, standing immobile a few feet from the stove, his bundle under

his arm, was gaping at the splendid white plaster bust of the king. The girl, a young lady of the stout Franche-Comté type, well built and dressed so as to lend the café a touch of class, had already called him twice in a low voice that, she hoped, Julien alone would hear: "Monsieur! Monsieur!" Julien turned to face those two sweet blue eyes, and realized she was talking to him.

He strode over to the counter and the pretty girl as if he were marching up to engage the enemy. The sudden stride made him drop his bundle.

Ah, the pity our poor provincial will inspire in the schoolboys of Paris who, at fifteen, already know how to enter a café with a distinguished air! But such boys, so fashionable at fifteen, become, at eighteen, *common*. The passionate timidity one encounters from time to time in the provinces can sometimes overcome itself, and then it learns to change itself into a powerful will. Approaching this pretty girl who had deigned to speak to him, Julien said to himself, I need to tell her the truth, his courage arising and vanquishing his shyness.

"Madame, this is the first time in my life I've been to Besançon. I'd like to have some bread and a cup of coffee, and I mean to pay for it."

The girl smiled and reddened a little; she feared for this handsome young man once the billiard players noticed him and directed their ironic wit his way. It would frighten him, and that would be the last anyone would see of him.

"Come sit here close to me," she said, indicating a marble table that was almost hidden by the enormous mahogany counter that protruded into the room.

The girl leaned over the counter, a pose that allowed her to display her superb figure. Julien noticed it; his thinking suddenly took a sharp turn. The lovely demoiselle came and placed a cup in front of him along with some sugar and a bread roll. She hesitated in calling a waiter over to bring the coffee, because that would interrupt her time alone with Julien.

Julien was pensive, comparing this blond and hearty beauty with certain memories that had often aroused him. The realization that he was the object of her attraction immediately banished almost all his shyness. The pretty girl had only a moment; she could read the expression in Julien's eyes.

“All this pipe smoke is making you cough. You should come back in for breakfast tomorrow before eight. I’ll be almost alone in here then.”

“What’s your name?” asked Julien, with the caressing smile of a shyness that now felt itself fully reassured.

“Amanda Binet.”

“Would you allow me to send you a little parcel, about this size, in an hour or so?”

The lovely Amanda considered.

“They watch me here. What you’re asking might get me in trouble, but I’ll write down my home address and you can send your parcel there. You can send it to me with no fear.”

“My name is Julien Sorel,” said the young man. “I have no relatives and no friends here in Besançon.”

“Ah, I see,” she said happily. “You’re here for the law school?”

“Alas, no,” Julien replied. “I’m being sent to the seminary.”

The most complete discouragement put out all the light in Amanda’s eyes. She called for a waiter; now she was ready to do so. The waiter poured Julien’s coffee without even giving him a look.

Amanda was taking money at the counter; Julien felt proud at having had the nerve to speak with her. Now an argument broke out at one of the billiard tables. The players shouted and disputed with each other, the noise echoing in the vast hall and making a din that shocked Julien. Amanda was thinking, and she lowered her eyes.

“If you like, Mademoiselle,” he said abruptly and in a confident manner, “I could say that I’m your cousin.”

That little air of authority pleased Amanda. So he’s got something in him, she thought. She spoke rapidly, without looking at him, keeping her eye out for anyone who might be approaching the counter:

“I’m from Genlis, near Dijon. Say you’re from Genlis, too, a cousin of my mother’s.”

“I will.”

“Every Thursday at five during the summer, the seminarians come past the café here.”

“If you’re thinking of me when I pass, show it by having a bunch of violets in your hand.”

Amanda gave him a shocked look, which revived all Julien’s timidity; still, though he blushed deeply, he went on to say:

“I feel I’m falling in love with you, and violently.”

“Speak more quietly then,” she said, fear in her voice.

Julien tried to remember some phrases from an incomplete volume of *La nouvelle Héloïse* that he had come across at Vergy.<sup>105</sup> His memory served him well, and for ten minutes straight he enraptured Mademoiselle Amanda with recitation from *La nouvelle Héloïse*. His own courage delighted him, but then all of a sudden the lovely Franche-Comté girl assumed an air of glacial silence. One of her lovers had appeared in the doorway of the café.

He came up to the counter, whistling and swaggering; he looked at Julien. The latter, whose imagination always flew off immediately to extremes, began to think in detail about a duel. He went very pale, pushed away his cup, assumed an expression of utter confidence, and examined his rival with the most careful attention. While the rival’s gaze was lowered, and as he poured himself a drink at the bar as if to show how much he belonged there, Amanda shot Julien a look ordering him not to stare. He obeyed, and he stayed immobile for a couple of minutes, pale, thinking only of what might be about to take place; he was really superb at that moment. The rival had been shocked by Julien’s gaze; draining his brandy at a gulp, he said something to Amanda, and then, his hands tucked into the side pockets of his heavy frock coat, he strolled toward one of the billiard tables, puffing the air out of his mouth and watching Julien. The latter leaped up in a transport of rage, but he didn’t know what he ought to do to be insulting. He set his bundle down, and assuming the most swaggering air he could manage, he walked over to the billiard table.

In vain, the voice of prudence spoke to him:

“If you fight a duel on the first day in Besançon, that’s the end of your ecclesiastical career.”

What’s the difference! No one will ever be able to say I flinched in the face of insolence.

Amanda saw his courage; it made a pleasant contrast with the simplicity of his manners. At that moment, she preferred him to the man in the heavy coat. She got up and, while making it seem as though she were looking outside to see what was happening in the street, she came and stood between him and the billiard table.

“Don’t be giving that man dirty looks. He’s my brother-in-law.”

“So what? He stared at me.”

“Do you want to land me in trouble? Yes, he probably looked at you, and maybe he’ll even come and speak with you. I told him you’re a relative of my mother, and that you just got here from Genlis. He’s a Franche-Comtois, and he’s never been any farther than Dôle, on the road to Burgundy. So you can tell him anything you like without worrying.”

Still, Julien hesitated; quickly, she added, her barmaid’s imagination swiftly supplying her with an abundance of lies:

“He probably did look at you, but that was when he was asking me who you were. The man is boorish with everybody—he didn’t mean to insult you.”

Julien’s eye followed the so-called brother-in-law; he saw him buy a number for the game that was in progress at the farther billiard table, then heard his thick voice cry out, in a menacing tone, “I’m in.” Julien passed swiftly behind Mademoiselle Amanda and began to step toward the billiard table. Amanda grabbed hold of his arm:

“Come and pay me first,” she said.

I suppose that makes sense, Julien thought: she’s afraid I’ll leave without paying. Amanda was as agitated as he was, and had gone deep red; she gave him his change as slowly as she could, saying to him quietly:

“Leave the café this minute, or I won’t like you anymore. But I do like you, a lot.”

Julien did leave, but he did it slowly. It's my duty, isn't it, he kept asking himself, to go over there and stare at him, blow air in his face? The uncertainty of it kept him standing out on the boulevard for a whole hour, watching to see if his man came out. But he didn't, and Julien left.

He hadn't been more than a few hours in Besançon, and already he had managed to bungle things. The old surgeon-major long ago had given him a few lessons in fencing, despite his gout; such was the entirety of the knowledge and skill Julien could put at the service of his anger. But this embarrassment wouldn't matter in the slightest if only he knew some way to handle it other than going up and giving the man a slap. Because, if it came to a fist fight, his rival, an enormous man, would have beaten him soundly and left him lying there.

For a poor devil like me, Julien thought, without protectors, without money, there won't be much of a difference between the seminary and a prison. I should stow my civilian clothes in some inn here, where I can put my black suit back on. If I ever do manage to sneak out of the seminary for a few hours, I can manage well enough with those clothes to go visit Mademoiselle Amanda. This reasoning was sound enough; but Julien, passing every one of the inns, didn't have the courage to go into any of them.

Finally, as he passed the Ambassadors Hotel a second time, his busy eyes lit upon a fat woman, still rather young, with a ruddy complexion and a cheerful air about her. He went up to her and told her his story.

"Sure, my pretty little priest," the Ambassadors hostess said to him. "I'll keep your clothes here for you, and I'll even keep them brushed off for you. In weather like this, you really shouldn't let this kind of fabric go without care." She picked up a key and took him herself into a bedroom, suggesting that he make a note of exactly what he was leaving.

"Good God! How fine you look dressed like that, young Father Sorel!" exclaimed the fat woman when he came back down into the kitchen. "I'm going to see to it that you have a good dinner, and," she added quietly, "it's only going to cost you twenty sous instead of the fifty everybody else has to pay. Because after all, you have to be careful with your little *cash box*."



“I have ten louis,” Julien said with a certain pride.

“Oh, good God!” cried the hostess, alarmed. “Don’t say it so loud. There are plenty of bad eggs here in Besançon. They’ll rob you for that, and even less. Whatever you do, stay out of the cafés. They’re swarming with bad eggs.”

“Really!” said Julien, who now had something to think over.

“Only come here to my place. I’ll make you a coffee. And remember that you’ll always find a friend here, and a good dinner for twenty sous, and that’s saying something, if you ask me. Go on to the table now, and I’ll serve you myself.”

“I wouldn’t be able to eat,” Julien said. “I’m too worked up. I have to go enter the seminary as soon as I leave you.” The good woman wouldn’t let him go until she had filled his pockets with provisions. Finally, Julien set off on the path to the terrifying spot, the hostess pointing him the way from her doorstep.

## 25

# THE SEMINARY

*Three hundred thirty-six dinners at 83 centimes, and  
three hundred thirty-six suppers at 38 centimes; chocolate for  
those who are entitled; how much is the commission worth?*

THE VALENOD OF BESANÇON<sup>106</sup>

He could see the gilded iron cross over the gate from some distance. He approached slowly; his legs seemed to be giving out beneath him. So this is it—this is the hell on earth I’ll never escape from! At last he decided to ring the bell. The ringing echoed as if in some deserted locale. Ten minutes later, a pale man, dressed all in black, came and opened the gate. Julien looked at him—and immediately lowered his eyes. The porter had a bizarre appearance. His bulging green eyes were round like a cat’s; the contours of his immobile eyelids

announced that here would be found no human sympathy; his thin lips spread out like a semicircle around his jutting teeth. His physiognomy, however, did not suggest a criminal nature but rather that perfect, complete insensibility which is even more terrifying to the young. The only feeling Julien's rapid glance could detect in this tall, thin, pious figure was an utter contempt for anything a person might say to him, if it did not concern the subject of heaven.

Julien raised his eyes with an effort, and in a voice that trembled due to the pounding of his heart, he explained that he wished to see Monsieur Pirard, the director of the seminary. Without saying a word, the man in black signaled that he should follow. They went up two flights of a broad staircase with wooden banisters, its steps sloping down away from the wall, looking as if they were about to cave in. A small door with a big wooden cemetery cross painted black above it was opened, with some difficulty, and the porter showed him into a gloomy, low-ceilinged room whose whitewashed walls were decorated with two large paintings blackened by time. Julien was left alone there; he felt devastated, his heart beating violently, and he wished he could have the relief of weeping. A deathlike silence reigned throughout the house.

After a quarter of an hour, which seemed at least a day to him, the sinister porter reappeared in another door on the other side of the room, and without deigning to speak, beckoned him forward. He entered another, bigger room, one that was poorly lighted. The walls here, too, were whitewashed, but nothing hung upon them. Over in a corner, Julien made out a bed made of pine-wood, two straw chairs, and a small armchair made of pinewood planks with no cushion. At the other end of the room, beside a little window of yellowed glass, sporting some ill-tended flowerpots, he saw a man sitting at a table, shrouded in a shabby cassock; he appeared to be angry, taking one piece after another from a pile of little squares of paper, which he then laid out across the table after having written a few words on each. He evidently didn't see Julien. The latter stood immobile in the middle of the room, exactly where the porter had left him when he slipped out and closed the door.

Ten minutes passed thus while the shabbily dressed man continued to write. Julien was so wrought up, in such a state of terror, that he felt he was on the

point of collapsing. A philosopher might have said, though the philosopher might have been wrong; this is the violent impression that ugliness makes upon a soul formed for the beautiful.

The writing man raised his head; it took Julien a moment to realize this, and even after having seen it, he remained as immobile as if he had just been struck dead by that lethal gaze directed at him. Julien's swimming eyes could just make out a long face, spotted all over with red blotches except on the forehead, and that was of a corpse-like pallor. Between those red cheeks and that white forehead gleamed two small black eyes that would terrify the bravest of men. The vast contours of the forehead were bordered by thick, flat, jet-black hair.

"Are you going to come closer—yes or no?" the man finally said, impatiently.

Julien took an uncertain step forward, and paler than he had ever been, ready to fall right down to the ground, he stopped a few feet from the wooden table covered with its slips of paper.

"Closer," said the man.

Julien stepped forward, reaching out his hand as if seeking something he could lean on for support.

"Your name?"

"Julien Sorel."

"Well, you're very late," he said, casting again that terrifying gaze upon him.

Julien could not endure that stare; stretching out his hand as if for support, he collapsed, falling full length on the floor.

The man rang. Julien could neither see nor move, but he could hear steps approaching.

They picked him up and set him on the little pinewood armchair. He heard the terrible man say to the porter:

"An epileptic fit, I suppose—the crowning touch."

When Julien was able to open his eyes, the red-faced man was back at his writing; the porter had disappeared. I need to be brave, our hero said to himself, and above all I must hide what I'm feeling. He felt like he was about to be violently sick. If I have an accident, God knows what they'll think of me. Eventually, the man stopped writing, and he looked sidelong at Julien:

“Are you able to respond to me?”

“Yes, Monsieur,” said Julien in a feeble voice.

“Ah—that’s good.”

The man in black had half got up, impatiently looking for a letter in the drawer of the pinewood table, which opened with a screech. He found it, slowly sat back down, and looked again at Julien, with an expression calculated to drain off what little life remained in him:

“You’ve been recommended to me by Father Chélan, the best curé in the diocese, the most virtuous of men, and a friend of mine for thirty years.”

“Ah! Then it’s Monsieur Pirard with whom I have the honor of speaking,” said Julien in a dying voice.

“Evidently,” replied the director of the seminary, giving him an irritated look.

The glitter of his small eyes intensified, followed by an involuntary twitch of the muscles at the corners of his mouth. This was the physiognomy of the tiger, reveling in advance at the pleasure it was about to have devouring its prey.

“Monsieur Chélan’s letter is short,” he said, as if speaking to himself. “*Intellegenti pauca*:<sup>107</sup> in times like these, one can’t write too little.” He read aloud:

*“I write to you concerning Julien Sorel, from this parish, whom I baptized almost twenty years ago; son of a rich carpenter who, however, gives him nothing. Julien will be an exceptional worker in the vineyards of the Lord. He has a strong memory and intellect, and he’s capable of reflection. Will his vocation endure? Is it a sincere one?”*

“*Sincere!*” repeated the abbé Pirard, seeming astonished, and turning to stare at Julien, but this time the abbé’s face was somewhat less devoid of all humanity. “*Sincere!*” he repeated, lowering his voice and continuing to read:

*“I ask that you give Julien Sorel a scholarship; he will earn it through his required examinations. I’ve taught him a little theology, the good old kind of Bossuet, Arnauld, and Fleury.<sup>108</sup> If he doesn’t suit you, send him back to me; the director of our poorhouse here, a man you know well, has offered him an eight-hundred franc salary to be tutor to his children. —I am inwardly tranquil, thanks be to God. I’m getting used to the terrible blow. Vale et me ama.”<sup>109</sup>*

The abbé Pirard slowed his reading as he came to the end, and when he read the signature, he pronounced the name Chélan with a sigh.

“He feels tranquil,” he said. “Well, the man’s virtue earned him that recompense, and may God grant it me too, if ever I come to need it!” With that, he looked heavenward and made the sign of the cross. The sight of that holy symbol diminished the profound horror that had frozen Julien over since he set foot in the building.

“I have three hundred and twenty-one aspirants here for the holiest of states,” said the abbé Pirard finally with a severe but not malicious tone. “Only seven or eight of them have been recommended to me by men like the abbé Chélan; and so, among this three hundred and twenty-one, you will be the ninth. But do not expect favor or indulgence from my protection: rather, expect an increased surveillance and an even greater severity against vices. Go lock that door.”

Julien made an effort to walk and managed not to fall down. He noticed that a little window, right next to the door he had come through, looked out on the countryside. He looked out at the trees; the sight did him good, as if he were gazing upon old friends.

“*Loquerisne linguam latinam?*” (Do you speak Latin?), asked the abbé Pirard as he returned.

“*Ite, pater optime*” (Yes, my excellent Father), replied Julien, beginning to feel a little more like himself. Certainly he had never encountered any man he would have been less inclined to call excellent than Abbé Pirard over the previous half hour.

The conversation continued in Latin. The expression in the abbé’s eyes began to soften; Julien regained some of his composure. How weak I am, he thought, to have let these appearances of virtue overwhelm me! This man will turn out to be just another crook like Maslon, and Julien congratulated himself for having been shrewd enough to hide his money in his boots.

Abbé Pirard examined Julien on his theology and was surprised at the breadth of his knowledge. His surprise only increased when he questioned him particularly about the Holy Scriptures. But when it came to questions concerning the doctrines of the Church Fathers, he could see that Julien was almost

completely ignorant, to the point of not even knowing the names of Saint Jerome, Saint Augustine, Saint Bonaventure, Saint Basil, etc., etc.

There it is, thought Father Pirard, that fatal inclination toward Protestantism that I've always reproached Chélan for. A deep knowledge—and a too-deep knowledge—of Holy Scripture.

(Julien had just been talking to him, without having been questioned on the topic, about the *true* dating of Genesis, the books of the Pentateuch, etc.)

Where does it lead, all this endless obsession with the Holy Scriptures, thought Father Pirard, if not to *personal judgment*, that is, the worst kind of Protestantism? And to guide and correct this imprudence, no help at all from the Fathers!

But the surprise of the seminary director knew no bounds when, in questioning Julien concerning the authority of the pope, and expecting to hear the usual maxims from the traditions of the Gallican Church, the young man began reciting practically the whole of Joseph de Maistre's book.<sup>110</sup>

What a strange man that Chélan is, thought Father Pirard. Did he give him that book to teach him to laugh at it?

It was in vain that he questioned Julien to discover whether he seriously believed in the doctrine of Monsieur de Maistre. The young man responded only with memorizations. By now, Julien was feeling quite well, in full mastery of himself. After this long examination, he believed that Monsieur Pirard's severity toward him was only a show. In fact, if it weren't for the principles of solemn austerity that, for the preceding fifteen years, he had imposed upon himself as the right way to deal with his theology students, the seminary director would have embraced Julien in the name of logic, so clear, so precise, and so pointed did he find the young man's answers.

This is a strong, healthy mind, he said to himself, but *corpus debile* (the flesh is weak.)

"Do you often fall like that?" he asked Julien in French, pointing down at the floor.

"It's the first time in my whole life. The porter's appearance terrified me," Julien added, blushing like a child.

Father Pirard almost smiled.

“There you see the effects of the vain pomps of this world; you’re evidently accustomed to smiling faces, which are veritable theaters of falsehood. The truth, Monsieur, is austere. But then, isn’t our task here below an austere one too? You’ll have to keep your conscience on guard against this weakness: *too much sensibility to vain external beauties.*”

Reverting to Latin, with a marked pleasure in doing so, Father Pirard said, “If you hadn’t been recommended to me by a man like the abbé Chélan, I would speak to you in the vain language of this world to which you seem all too accustomed. The full scholarship you’re seeking, I can tell you, is the most difficult in the world to get. But the abbé Chélan has managed to earn little indeed after his fifty-six years of apostolic service, if he cannot command a scholarship at the seminary.”

Then Father Pirard advised Julien not to join any secret society or congregation without his consent.

“I give you my word of honor,” said Julien in the warm, heartfelt tones of a decent man.

The seminary director smiled for the first time.

“We don’t use language like that here,” he said. “It has too much of that vain honor so prized by men of the world, which impels them toward so many sins and even crimes. You have a sacred debt of obedience to me by virtue of paragraph 17 in the bull *Unum Ecclesiam* of Pius V.<sup>111</sup> I am your ecclesiastical superior. In this house, my very dear son, to hear is to obey. How much money do you have?”

Here we go, thought Julien. This explains the “very dear son.”

“Thirty-five francs, Father.”

“Keep scrupulous notes of your spending. You’ll have to account for it to me.”

This painful conversation had lasted three hours. Julien went to call for the porter.

“Put Julien Sorel in cell number 103,” Abbé Pirard told him.

This was a great favor: Julien was being given a room to himself.

“Take up his trunk,” he added.

Julien looked down and recognized his trunk standing right in front of him; he’d been looking at it for the past three hours without recognizing it.

When he got up to cell 103, a tiny room eight feet square on the highest floor of the house, Julien saw that it looked out over the ramparts, and beyond them one could see the pretty plain separated from the city by the river Doubs.

What a charming view! Julien exclaimed, but though he spoke those words, he felt nothing. The violent sensations he had been subjected to during the brief time he had been in Besançon had exhausted him thoroughly. He sat down beside the window on the sole wooden chair in the cell, and soon fell into a deep sleep. He didn’t hear the bell for supper, nor that for evening prayers; he had been forgotten.

When the first rays of sunlight woke him up the following morning, he was stretched out asleep on the floor.

## 26

# THE WORLD— OR, WHAT THE RICH LACK

*I am all alone on earth; no one deigns to think of me.*

*The ones busy making their fortunes have a certain boldness  
and hard-heartedness that I do not find in myself.*

*They hate me for finding it easy to be good.*

*Ah, soon enough I’ll die, whether from hunger or from  
having to see such hard-hearted men.*



He hurriedly brushed his clothes and rushed downstairs; he was late. An undermaster gave him a severe scolding; instead of trying to excuse himself, Julien crossed his arms across his chest:

“*Peccavi, pater optime*” (I have sinned and I avow my sin, my Father), he said with a contrite air.

This beginning was a grand success. The clever ones among the seminarians saw at once that this was a man who was already skilled in the ways of his profession. When the time for recreation came, Julien found that he was an object of general curiosity. But he met their questions with reserve and silence. In keeping with the maxims he had formed for himself, he considered these three hundred and twenty-one comrades his enemies; and in his view, the most dangerous of them all was the abbé Pirard.

A few days later, Julien had to choose his confessor, and he was presented with a list.

Good God! What kind of a fool do they take me for? he asked himself. Do they think I can't see the writing on the wall? And he chose Father Pirard.

He had no idea how decisive this step was. A little fellow seminarian, very young still, a native of Verrières, who declared himself Julien's friend from the first day, told him that if he had chosen Monsieur Castanède, the assistant director of the seminary, he might possibly have acted just a bit more prudently.

“Father Castanède is the enemy of Monsieur Pirard, who is suspected of Jansenism,” the little seminarian added, speaking quietly into Julien's ear.

All the first moves made by our hero, who thought he was being so careful, were, like the choice of confessor, serious mistakes. Blinded by the vast presumption of an imaginative man, he took his intentions for facts, and he believed himself a consummately skilled hypocrite. His foolishness went so far as to reproach himself for his easy successes in that art, the art of weakness.

Alas, it's the only weapon I have! In another era, my actions in the face of the enemy would've been *what earned me my bread*.

Julien, content with the way he was conducting himself, looked around, and everywhere he saw the appearance of the purest virtue.

Some nine or ten seminarians lived in the odor of sanctity, having visions

like those of Saint Teresa and Saint Francis, when he received the stigmata on Mount Verna in the Apennines.<sup>113</sup> But these were all terribly secret, their friends keeping quiet about it. Those poor young visionaries were almost always laid up in the infirmary. A hundred or so of the others combined a robust faith with tireless application. They worked till they made themselves sick, but without learning much. Two or three had real talent—among others, one named Chazel; but Julien felt alien from them, and to them.

The rest of the three hundred and twenty-one seminarians were nothing but crude creatures who were not even sure of the meanings of the Latin terms they parroted all day long. They were almost all the sons of peasants, who had decided they'd rather gain their bread by reciting a few Latin phrases than by tilling the soil. These observations, which Julien made during the first few days there, convinced him he would have rapid success. After all, he told himself, in any sort of service, people of intelligence will always be needed, because there's always work that needs to be done. Under Napoleon, I would have been a sergeant-major; among these future parish priests, I'll be a vicar-general.

Every one of these poor devils, he continued, has been a manual laborer since childhood, living on curdled milk and black bread until they got here. Back in their cottages, they'd get meat maybe five or six times a year. Like those Roman soldiers who found war more restful than their normal lives, these crude peasants are enchanted with the delicacies of the seminary.

In their dreary expressions, Julien could read nothing but the satisfaction of a bodily need after dinner, or, before dinner, the expectation of that physical pleasure. Such were the men among whom he would have to distinguish himself; but what Julien did not realize, and what they all kept from him, was that to be the first in the different seminary courses—dogma, ecclesiastical history, etc., etc.—was in their eyes nothing more than the *sin of pride*. Ever since Voltaire, or since government by two chambers,<sup>114</sup> which is really nothing more than *distrust and independent thinking*, and which turns the people's minds to a general mistrust, the French Church seems to have understood that books are her true enemies. In her eyes, all that really matters is the total submission of the heart. In her eyes, success in one's studies, even sacred studies, is quite

rightly suspect. What would prevent the superior man from passing over to the enemy, like Sieyès or Grégoire?<sup>115</sup> The trembling Church clings to the pope as to its last chance for salvation. Only the pope can try to paralyze the habit of independent thinking, and, with the pious splendors of the ceremonies at his court, make an impression on the dulled and sickly minds of worldly people.

Julien had halfway mastered these various truths, though most of what is actually spoken in a seminary tends to belie them, and he fell into a deep melancholy. He worked a great deal, and he rapidly succeeded in acquiring the things most useful to a priest, all quite false in his eyes, and all lacking any interest for him. He felt there was nothing else he could do.

Am I forgotten, then, and all alone on this earth? he thought. He did not know that Monsieur Pirard had intercepted, and tossed directly into the fire, some letters postmarked from Dijon, letters in which the most conventional style couldn't quite mask the keenest passion. This grand love was evidently in conflict with great remorse. All the better, thought Abbé Pirard. At least the young man has been in love with a religious woman.

One day Father Pirard opened a letter that seemed half-effaced by tears; it was an eternal adieu. At last, the letter said, addressing Julien, heaven has given me the grace to hate not the author of my sin, for he will forever be the dearest person in the world to me, but my sin itself. The sacrifice has been made, my friend. It is not without tears, as you can see. But the salvation of those I'm bound closest to, the ones you loved so well, requires it. A God both just and terrible will no longer be able to visit his vengeance on them for the crimes their mother has committed. Adieu, Julien, and be just in your relations with men.

The last line of the letter was almost illegible. There was a Dijon address, though the writer hoped Julien would not reply—or at least if he did, he would be sure to use the kind of language that a woman who has made her way back to a life of virtue could read without blushing.

Julien's melancholic state of mind, aided by the mediocre food the vendor supplied to the seminary at eighty-three centimes a head, was starting to affect his health when, one morning, Fouqué suddenly appeared in his room.

"I finally got in! Five times now I've come to Besançon to see you. Don't worry—I'm not blaming you—and every time nothing but a locked gate. I even posted somebody at the gate to watch, but why the devil don't you ever come out?"

"It's kind of a test I've set for myself."

"You seem changed. Finally I get to see you. Two shiny five-franc pieces have just taught me how stupid I was not to have made use of them the first time."

The two friends eagerly talked on and on. Julien changed color when Fouqué said:

"By the way, have you heard that the mother of your two pupils has turned into a religious fanatic?"

He tossed it off with the indifferent tone that makes such a remarkable impression on the impassioned soul whose most cherished mental possessions are being destroyed by the unknowing speaker.

"Oh yes, my friend, and the most exalted kind of devotion too. They say she's making pilgrimages. But to the eternal shame of that abbé Maslon, who has been spying for so long on poor Father Chélan, Madame de Rênal wanted nothing to do with him. She goes to confession in Dijon or Besançon."

"She comes to Besançon!" exclaimed Julien, his forehead flushing.

"Often enough," replied Fouqué, with an inquisitive tone.

"Do you have any *Constitutionnels* with you?"

"What's that?" asked Fouqué.

"I'm asking you if you have any *Constitutionnels*," Julien replied, in the calmest possible voice. "They sell them here for thirty sous a copy."

"Well! Even in the seminary you find Liberals!" cried Fouqué. "Oh, my poor France!" he added, mockingly imitating the unctuous tones of Father Maslon.

The visit would have made a deep impression on our hero, except for something the little Verrières seminarian, who seemed such a child, told him the next day, leading Julien to a significant revelation. Ever since he had come to the seminary, Julien learned, his conduct had been nothing but a long trail of blunders. Now he mocked himself bitterly.

True, the important actions in his life had been managed well, but he took

no care for the details, and the shrewdest ones in the seminary noticed only the details. And so it had come to pass that his comrades there already took him for a freethinker. He had betrayed himself by a great many little things.

In their eyes, he stood convicted of one horrendous vice: *he thought and judged for himself*, instead of blindly following *authority* and example. Father Pirard had been of no help to him; he had not even spoken with him outside the confessional, and there he listened more than he talked. Things would have been quite different if he had chosen Father Castanède.

As soon as Julien realized his folly, he ceased being bored. He wanted to find out the extent of the damage, and with that in mind he came out a little from behind the wall of haughty, stubborn silence he had erected between himself and his fellows. And that was when they took their revenge. His advances were treated with a contempt bordering on derision. He realized that since his arrival in the seminary, not one hour had passed—especially during recreation time—without some consequence either against his reputation or in favor of it, not one hour that had failed either to increase the number of his enemies or to win the goodwill of some genuinely virtuous seminarian, one a little less boorish than the others. The damage to be repaired was immense, the task extremely difficult. Henceforth Julien was always on the alert; he needed to create an entirely new persona.

For example, the way his eyes moved about had a significantly negative effect on his reputation. It is no trivial matter that in a place like this, most kept their eyes lowered. How presumptuous I was in Verrières, Julien thought. I thought I was actually living, when in fact all I was doing was preparing for life. Here I am in the world the way it is, the way it will be until I come to my end, surrounded by real enemies. What enormous labor it takes, he continued, maintaining this hypocrisy every single minute; it makes Hercules's labors look easy. The Hercules of modern times was Sixtus V, whose quiet modesty fooled people for fifteen years, and forty cardinals, too, even though they had seen him as a young man, fiery and proud.<sup>116</sup>

So learning counts for nothing here! he said to himself bitterly; all that progress in dogma, sacred history, etc., matters only for appearance. Everything

said on the subject is just a trap laid for fools like me to fall into! And my only merit was in my progress, my ability to grasp all that nonsense. Could it be that at bottom they actually value it just as it really should be valued? That they see it the same way I do? And I was idiot enough to be proud of it! All those high grades I got only served to make my enemies even more fixed in their enmity. Chazel, who's more learned than I am, always manages to insert some gibberish into his piece that drops his grade down to fiftieth place; if he does come in first, it's only because he slipped up. Oh, just a hint from Monsieur Pirard could have been so useful to me!

Once Julien's eyes were opened, the long exercises in ascetic piety, like the rosary five times a week, the canticles of the Sacred Heart, etc., etc., which had seemed so lethally boring to him, now became his most interesting actions. Severely chastising himself as he reflected, and seeking especially not to overstate his own abilities, Julien did not start out with the goal that some others did, those seminarians who wanted to be models for the rest, to make every moment a chance for significant actions—that is, to try to be a model of Christian perfection. At the seminary, the very way you eat your boiled egg is evidence of your progress in piety.

Reader, you may be smiling, but please do take a moment to remind yourself of the mistakes the abbé Delille made in eating his egg when invited to a meal with a great lady of the court of Louis XIV.<sup>117</sup>

Julien tried to arrive at the middle way of the *non culpa*—that is, the state of a young seminarian whose gait, way of moving his arms, his eyes, etc., have nothing particularly worldly about them, but on the other hand also are not meant to suggest a person whose entire being is absorbed in thoughts of the afterlife, and of the *nothingness* of this life.

Julien was constantly coming across little messages scrawled on the walls in charcoal, like this: "What are sixty years of difficulty and trial compared to an eternity of delights, or an eternity spent boiling in oil down in hell!" He no longer despised them; he understood that he must keep his eyes on them at all times. What am I going to be doing my whole life, he said to himself, but selling a spot in heaven to the faithful? And how am I going to make it seem real to them? By the difference between my exterior and that of a layman.

But even after a month of careful efforts, Julien continued to look as if he were *thinking*. The way he moved his eyes and mouth—somehow these did not signal that implicit faith, that readiness to believe anything and endorse everything, even unto martyrdom. He was enraged to see that look so readily achieved on the faces of the crudest peasants. There was a good reason why they appeared not to be thinking.

How he struggled to attain that physiognomy of fervent, blind faith, ready to believe everything, to suffer everything, that is found so frequently in the convents of Italy, that countenance that Guercino has so perfectly given us laymen in his paintings in churches.<sup>118</sup>

On the great feast days, the seminarians were given sausages with sauerkraut. His neighbors sitting next to him at the table noticed that Julien seemed to be indifferent to this luxury; this was one of his first crimes. His fellows saw in this a vivid and odious mark of the most stupid hypocrisy; nothing made him more enemies than this. Look at this bourgeois, look how disdainful he is, pretending to despise the best fare there is, sausages and sauerkraut! Shame on the spoiled brat, the highfalutin damned soul! What he should have done was refrain, as an act of penance, from eating his whole serving, making a sacrifice of it and saying to some neighbor, pointing to the sauerkraut, “What can a man offer to the Almighty if not the experience of *voluntary suffering*?”

Julien didn’t have the experience he would have needed to pull off something like that and be sure it was observed.<sup>119</sup>

Alas, cried Julien in moments of despair, the ignorance of these young peasants, my fellows here, is an immense advantage for them! When they came to the seminary in the first place, their teachers didn’t have to rid them of all the worldly ideas I brought along with me and that they can read on my face, no matter what I do.

Julien studied, with such intensity that it bordered on envy, the grossest of the little peasants who came to the seminary. When they first arrived and were stripped of their rough wool jackets and dressed instead in their black robes, their education heretofore had been nothing more than an immense, unbounded respect for money, *both the dry kind and the liquid kind*, as the saying goes in the Franche-Comté.

This is the sacramental, the heroic way of expressing the sublime idea denoted by the word *cash*.

Happiness for these young seminarians—as for the heroes of Voltaire’s tales—consists above all in dining well. Julien detected in nearly all of them an innate respect for anyone wearing a suit of *fine cloth*. This sentiment gives the true value, or perhaps even less than the true value, of the *distributive justice* that our courts mete out to us. Where’s the profit, they liked to repeat, in taking one of the *big fellows* to court?

That’s the phrase they use in the Jura to denote a wealthy man. So you can guess their respect for the wealthiest of them all: the government!

Failing to smile with respect at the very mention of the prefect is, in the eyes of the peasants of the Franche-Comté, imprudent; and the poor know that imprudence is swiftly punished by a lack of bread.

After having been at first almost suffocated by his feelings of contempt, Julien came to feel pity instead: most of his fellows had often had the experience of seeing their fathers come home to their cottages on winter evenings to find neither bread nor chestnuts nor potatoes. Why should it be surprising then, Julien asked himself, if their idea of the fortunate man is one who’s just eaten a good dinner and owns a decent suit of clothes? My fellows here have a firm, solid vocation, which is to say that they see the ecclesiastical life as a way of continuing this happiness for a long, long time: dining well and owning a warm coat for the winter.

It chanced that Julien heard a young seminarian, one gifted with imagination, say to his companion:

“Why couldn’t I be pope someday, like Sixtus V? He was a swineherd.”

“They only make Italians pope,” his friend replied. “But there definitely is a chance for us to get places as vicars-general, as canons, maybe even as bishops. Monsieur P\*\*\*, the bishop of Châlons, is the son of a cooper, which is my father’s trade.”

One day, in the middle of a dogma lesson, Father Pirard summoned Julien. The poor young man was only too delighted to get away from the physical and moral atmosphere in which he had been plunged.



But Julien found the same kind of icy reception from the director as he had on his first day in the seminary.

“Explain to me what’s written on this playing card,” he said, giving Julien the kind of look that made the latter wish the earth would open and swallow him up.

*Amanda Binet, at the Giraffe café, before eight o’clock. Say you’re from Genlis, and my mother’s cousin.*

Julien immediately understood the immense danger he faced; the abbé Castanède’s police had stolen the card from him.

“The day I came here,” he began, fixing his eyes on Father Pirard’s forehead because he couldn’t bear meeting his terrible gaze, “I trembled with fear: Monsieur Chélan had told me that this place was a nest of informers and spiteful people. Spying on each other, denouncing each other are encouraged here. This is the way heaven wants it, so young priests will learn what life is really like, and so they’ll be inspired to disdain the world and all its pomps.”

“And you dare to make a speech like that to me!” exclaimed Father Pirard, furiously. “You little scoundrel!”

“At Verrières,” Julien continued coolly, “my brothers would beat me whenever they thought they had reason to be jealous of me . . .”

“Get to the point! Get to the point!” cried Father Pirard, almost beside himself.

But without being intimidated in the least, Julien continued his narration.

“The day I arrived in Besançon, around noon, I was hungry, and I went into a café. I felt a deep repugnance at being in such a profane place, but I thought my lunch would cost me less than it would at an inn. A lady, who appeared to be the owner of the place, took pity on my naive and unexperienced appearance. ‘Besançon is full of bad eggs,’ she said to me, and ‘I’m afraid for you, Monsieur. If anything bad happens to you, come to me for help, or let me know, anytime before eight o’clock. If the seminary porters refuse to deliver your note, say that you’re my cousin, a native of Genlis . . .’”

“All this rigamarole will have to be verified,” exclaimed Father Pirard, who, unable to sit still, was pacing around the room.

“Have him taken to his cell.”

The abbé followed behind Julien and locked him in. The latter began to look through his trunk, at the bottom of which the fatal card had been carefully hidden. There was nothing missing, but a number of items had been moved around, even though the key had never left his possession. I’m so lucky, Julien thought, that during this time when I’ve been so blind to things, I never acted on the permission I was given to leave the building—permission that Monsieur Castanède offered me out of a kindness that I now understand. I might have been weak enough to change my clothes and go see the beautiful Amanda, and that would have been the ruin of me. When they gave up on trapping me that way, they turned to using the card to denounce me.

Two hours later, the director summoned him.

“You have not lied to me,” he said, his expression now somewhat less severe. “But to hold on to such an address is an imprudence so grave you can scarcely comprehend it. Wretched boy! In ten years, perhaps, this will return to do you harm.”

## 27

# FIRST EXPERIENCE OF LIFE

*The present moment, good God! is the ark  
of the Lord. Cursed be he who touches it.*

DIDEROT<sup>120</sup>

The reader will perhaps be good enough to excuse us for providing very few clear, precise facts from this period in Julien’s life. It’s not that such details are lacking—quite the contrary; but perhaps what he experienced in the seminary

is simply too black for the more moderately colorful tone we have tried to maintain in these pages. Contemporaries who have suffered through certain experiences cannot recall them with anything other than horror, a horror that annihilates any other pleasure, including that of reading a tale.

Julien had little success in his attempts at hypocritical behavior; he had moments where he fell into a state of disgust, even into utter discouragement. He couldn't do anything right, and the career he was studying for was a miserable one to boot. The slightest outside help would have been enough to raise his morale, for the obstacles in front of him were not that great; but he was alone, like a ship abandoned and afloat on the ocean. And even if I did succeed, he said to himself, to have to spend my whole life with foul people like this! Gluttons who can't think of anything beyond the bacon omelet they're going to have for dinner, or priests like Castanède, for whom no crime is too black! They'll rise to power, all right, but great God, at what a price!

The human will is powerful, I see signs of that everywhere, but is it powerful enough to overcome the kind of disgust I feel? The task facing great men used to be clear-cut: no matter how terrible the danger was, the task was beautiful to them, but why am I the only one who can really see the ugliness all around me?

This was the moment of the greatest trial in his life. It would be so easy to go enlist in one of the regiments garrisoned at Besançon! He could become a Latin teacher; he didn't need much to live on! But then—no more career, no more future for his imagination to work on: it was death. Here are the details of one of his miserable days.

One morning he said to himself, I've often been presumptuous enough to flatter myself that I wasn't like these other peasants! Well, now I've lived long enough to realize that *difference arouses hatred*. This great truth was revealed to him through one of his most painful moments of failure. He had been working for a week to make himself liked by a student who moved through his days in the odor of sanctity. He was walking along with him in the courtyard, listening submissively to the kind of drivel that would make a man fall asleep standing up. Suddenly a storm blew up; thunder rumbled, and the holy little student cried out, pushing him away in the rudest way.

“Listen: it’s everybody for himself in this world, and I don’t want to get burned alive by lightning. God might be about to blast you for an infidel, like a Voltaire.”

His teeth clenched in rage, he turned his eyes up to the stormy sky, streaked with lightning: “I’d deserve to be drowned if I let myself sleep during this tempest!” cried Julien. “Let’s try to win over some other little prig.”

The bell rang, announcing the start of Father Castanède’s class in sacred history.

On that day, the abbé Castanède was teaching all those young peasants, who lived so deeply afraid of the bruising toil and the poverty of their fathers, that the government had no true, legitimate power apart from what God’s vicar on earth delegated to it.

“Make yourselves worthy of the pope’s bounty by the sanctity of your lives, by your obedience, and be *like a rod in God’s hands*,”<sup>121</sup> he continued, “and you’re going to get yourself a superb position where you’ll be in full command, answerable to no one else; a permanent position, one where the government pays one-third of the salary, and your flock, shaped and molded by your preaching, will pay the other two-thirds.”

When he left his classroom, Monsieur Castanède stopped in the courtyard. “It’s well said of a parish priest: ‘the worth of the man matches up with the worth of the position,’” he said to the students forming a circle around him. “I’ve known—personally, I really have—of mountain parishes that paid better than many of the ones in towns. There was just as much money in them, and on top of that there were fat capons, eggs, fresh butter, and a thousand pleasant little details: and the priest always comes first up there; there’s never a good meal but he’s invited to it and honored too,” etc.

Monsieur Castanède had no sooner gone up to his room than the students began to break into groups. No group included Julien; they shrank from him as if he were a sheep with mange. In each of the groups, he saw a student flip a sou in the air, and if he guessed rightly whether it came down heads or tails, his comrades concluded that he would one day have one of those fat parishes.

Then came the anecdotes. There was a young priest, ordained only a year,

who offered a tame rabbit to an older priest's servant, and just a few months later, when the old priest died, he became the one to replace him in the fine parish. Another one had succeeded in getting himself named as successor in an affluent country town because he assisted the paralytic old priest with his every meal, carving his chicken for him with style.

The seminarians, like the young men of every profession, exaggerated the impact of these little methods that seem so extraordinary and strike the imagination.

Julien thought, I must find out how I can take part in these conversations. When they weren't talking about sausages and fat parishes, they were discussing the worldly aspects of ecclesiastical doctrines—discord between bishops and prefects, mayors and priests. Julien could see the idea of a second God beginning to take shape, but a God much more frightening and much more powerful; this second God was the pope. They said, but with lowered voices, and only when they were quite sure they would not be overheard by Monsieur Pirard, that if the pope didn't take the trouble to appoint all the prefects and all the mayors in France, it was only because he had delegated that duty to the king of France, naming him the eldest son of the Church.

It was around that time that Julien thought he might enhance his standing by displaying his esteem for Monsieur de Maistre's book, *On the Pope*. It is quite true that this surprised his fellows; but it turned against him too. He irritated them by expressing their opinions better than they could do themselves. Monsieur Chélan had been imprudent on Julien's account as well as on his own. After teaching him the habit of sound reasoning, and of not letting himself be tripped up by empty words, he neglected to inform him that such habits, in someone not well liked, are a crime, for sound reasoning always gives offense.

Julien's ability to speak well thus became a new crime. His fellows, when they had to think about him at all, managed to come up with the term that summed up all the horror he inspired in them: they nicknamed him MARTIN LUTHER; mainly, they said, because of that hellish logic of his that made him so proud.

There were a number of young seminarians with fresher complexions than Julien, and who could be considered better looking, but he had white hands,

and he was unable to keep hidden certain habits of personal cleanliness. These advantages were no advantages at all in the gloomy house into which fate had dropped him. The dirty peasants among whom he lived declared that he had extremely loose morals. But we fear wearying the reader with further tales of our hero's thousand misfortunes. For example, some of the strongest seminar-ians decided to take up the custom of beating him; he was obliged to arm himself with an iron compass and to let it be known, by signs, that he would not be afraid to use it. But signs are not as useful to the spy's reports as words are.

## 28

# A PROCESSION

*Every heart was touched. The presence of  
God seemed to have come down to these narrow  
Gothic streets, festooned on every side, and  
well sprinkled with sand by the faithful.*

YOUNG<sup>122</sup>

It was in vain that Julien tried to turn himself into a little fool, for he simply could not make himself liked; he was too different. Still, he said to himself, all these professors are intelligent men, chosen from among a thousand. Why don't they like my humility? Only one of them seemed ready to take advantage of his willingness to believe anything and to be anybody's dupe. This was the abbé Chas-Bernard, the director of ceremonies at the cathedral where, for the last fifteen years, he had been waiting to be named canon; while waiting, he taught sacred rhetoric at the seminary. His class was one of the two in which, during his period of blindness, Julien would consistently come in first. As a result, Father Chas had shown some signs of friendliness toward him, and when class got out, he would take Julien by the arm for a stroll in the garden.

What's he leading up to? Julien wondered. He wondered all the more as, for hours at a time, Father Chas would talk to him about the vestments owned by the cathedral. There were seventeen braided chasubles, not to mention the mourning vestments. They had invested great hopes in the elderly widow of Président de Rubempré;<sup>123</sup> this lady, for over seventy of her ninety years, had preserved her wedding gown of splendid Lyons material, all interwoven with gold. "Just imagine, my friend," Father Chas said, coming to a halt, his eyes widening, "the material stands up by itself—it has that much gold in it! Most people in Besançon think the widow will bequeath more than ten chasubles, along with four or five copes, to the cathedral's treasure, for the greater feast days. And I'll go further," said Father Chas, lowering his voice. "I have reason to think she will leave us eight magnificent silver-gilt candlesticks, which are believed to have been purchased in Italy by the Duke of Burgundy, Charles the Bold, whose chief minister was one of her ancestors."

But what is the man leading up to with all this trivia? thought Julien. He's been carefully grooming me for what seems like a century already, but nothing happens. He must really distrust me! He's sharper than all the others; their secrets are all revealed within a couple of weeks. Of course, I can understand why: the man's ambition has been stalled for fifteen years!

One evening, in the middle of their weapons drill,<sup>124</sup> Julien was summoned by Father Pirard, who said to him, "Tomorrow is the feast of Corpus Christi. "Monsieur Chas-Bernard needs you to help him decorate the cathedral; go and obey him." But then Father Pirard called him back and, with an air of commiseration, added, "It's your choice if you'd rather take this opportunity to go wandering around the town."

*"Incedo per ignes,"*<sup>125</sup> replied Julien (I have enemies watching me).

The next day, first thing in the morning, Julien made his way to the cathedral, walking with his eyes lowered. The sight of the town's streets and all the activity beginning around him did him good. Everywhere you looked, people were decorating their housefronts for the procession. His entire time at the seminary now seemed only a moment. His thoughts strayed to Vergy, and to that pretty Amanda Binet, whom he might run into, as her café was not far off

his route. From a distance he could see Father Chas-Bernard standing in the doorway of his beloved cathedral, a fat man with a joyful countenance and a welcoming air. On this day, he was in his element and triumphant: "I was waiting for you, my dear son," he cried when he first caught sight of Julien. "Welcome. Our work today will be long and hard, so let's fortify ourselves with a first breakfast. We'll have a second at ten, during the High Mass."

But Julien replied with a serious air: "I wish not to be left alone for a single moment, Monsieur. And please, take note," he added, pointing up to the clock above them, "that I arrived at one minute to five."

"Ah yes—those little rogues at the seminary have got you frightened! It's too good of you to give them even a moment's thought," said Father Chas. "But then, is a pathway any less beautiful for having thorns in the hedges that border it? The traveler walks right along, leaving the wicked thorns to fall off where they are. But now to work, my dear friend, to work!"

Father Chas was right in saying the work would be hard. There had been a major funeral ceremony in the cathedral the night before, so it had been impossible to make any preparations; this meant that in one morning they had to drape the Gothic pillars that form the three naves with a red damask cloth some thirty feet in length. The bishop had hired four decorators from Paris who came by mail coach, but those gentlemen couldn't do everything themselves, and far from encouraging the efforts of the Besançon volunteers, they mocked their awkwardness.

Julien saw that he would have to mount the ladder himself, his agility serving him well. He took on the task of directing the local decorators. Delighted, Father Chas watched him leap from ladder to ladder. When all the pillars had been hung with their damask, the next task was to go place five enormous arrangements of feathers atop the great baldachin over the main altar. A grand crown of gilded wood was supported on eight huge twisting pillars of Italian marble. But to reach the center of the baldachin, above the tabernacle, one had to cross over an old wooden ledge, which was possibly worm-eaten, some forty feet up from the floor.

The very sight of that arduous pathway had extinguished the laughter, so



vigorous till then, of the Parisian decorators; they looked up at it and discussed it a great deal, but without climbing up. Julien took hold of the bunches of feathers and rushed up the ladder. He arranged them perfectly atop the crown-shaped ornament at the center of the baldachin. As he came back down the ladder, Father Chas-Bernard embraced him:

*“Optime!”* he cried. “I’ll be sure to tell Monseigneur about this.”

The ten o’clock meal was as merry as could be. Never had Father Chas seen his church looking so fine.

“My dear disciple,” he said to Julien, “my mother used to rent out chairs in this venerable basilica, so in a sense I was raised in this great edifice. Robespierre’s Terror ruined us, but already at eight years old, which I was at the time, I was serving Masses in private houses, and they would feed me on Mass days. Nobody knew how to fold a chasuble better than I did—the gold braids were always kept perfectly intact. Since Napoleon’s restoration of the faith, I’ve been fortunate enough to be in charge of everything in this venerable cathedral. Five times every year I’ve seen it decked out with these beautiful ornaments, but it’s never been this resplendent. Never have the damask hangings been so perfectly arranged, or as closely fitted to the pillars, as they are today.”

He’s finally going to tell me his secret, thought Julien; he’s started talking about himself, and he’s becoming expansive. But even though the man was in a kind of exaltation, he let slip nothing imprudent. And yet he’s worked very hard, he’s clearly very happy, Julien said to himself, and he certainly hasn’t spared the wine. What a man! What an example for me. He takes the cake. (That was a vulgar expression he’d picked up from the old surgeon.)

As the Sanctus from the High Mass sounded, Julien wanted to put on a surplice so as to follow the bishop in the grand procession.

“But the thieves, my friend, the thieves!” cried Father Chas. “You aren’t thinking of them. The procession will leave. The church will be empty. You and I have to stay here and stand watch. We’ll be lucky if we don’t end up missing a few lengths of that fine braid that goes around the pillars. And that’s another gift from Madame de Rubempré. It comes from the famous count, her great-grandfather. It’s pure gold, my friend,” added the abbé, speaking in a

whisper, and clearly thrilled at the idea, “Nothing fake about it! I’ll put you in charge of watching over the north aisle—don’t go anywhere else. I’ll take the south aisle and the main nave. Keep an eye on the confessionals. The thieves spy from inside them, waiting for us to turn our backs for a minute.”

As he finished speaking, 11:45 sounded, and the great bell began to peal. The bell rang out at full strength, its rich, solemn tones stirring Julien. His imagination took flight, no longer earthbound.

The odor of the incense and of the rose leaves, which had been strewn before the Blessed Sacrament by little children in Saint John costumes, only added to his exaltation.

Now those grave, rich tones of the bell ought to have aroused in Julien nothing more than the idea of twenty men paid fifty centimes each, aided perhaps by fifteen or twenty volunteers from among the faithful. He ought to have been thinking of the wear and tear on the ropes, on the wood beams, of the danger of the bell itself, which tended to fall every couple of hundred years, and to have been thinking of ways to reduce the bell ringers’ salaries, or perhaps to pay them by some indulgence or some similar favor drawn from the treasures of the Church, which would not deplete her purse.

But instead of such wise reflections, Julien’s soul, raised up to exaltation by such virile, rich sounds, drifted off into imaginary landscapes. He would never make a good priest, or a good administrator. Souls that are moved like that are good for, at best, producing an artist. And this is where Julien’s audacity comes into true focus. Fifty, perhaps, of his fellow seminarians, rendered fully attentive to life’s realities by the public hatred and the Jacobinism they had been taught to see lurking behind every hedgerow, upon hearing the great cathedral bell would have thought of nothing beyond the salary of the bell ringers. They would have examined, with the genius of a Barrême,<sup>126</sup> whether the degree of emotion aroused in the public was worth the money being paid to the ringers. But if Julien had in fact tried to think of the material needs of the cathedral, his imagination would have leaped over all that and tried to find some way of saving forty francs in the manufacturing, and completely missed the chance to save twenty-five centimes.

Outside, in the finest weather possible, the procession slowly wound its way through Besançon, stopping at each of the altars of repose that the authorities had erected, competing with each other to make theirs the most splendid; but inside the cathedral, the profoundest silence reigned. Everything was in a semi-darkness and a pleasing coolness; the perfumes of the flowers and the incense lingered in the air.

The silence, the absolute solitude, and the coolness of the long nave made Julien's reveries all the sweeter. He didn't fear being interrupted by Father Chas, who was busy at the opposite end of the church. His soul had almost shed its mortal sheath, which was strolling slowly along the north aisle that had been entrusted to his care. He was even more calm, knowing that the confessionals held only a few pious women; his eyes were open, but he saw nothing.

But then he was partly pulled out of his distraction by the sight of two well-dressed women who had gone down on their knees, one in a confessional and the other near her, leaning upon a chair. He saw them without really registering them; but perhaps out of a vague sense of duty, or out of admiration for the fine clothes the two women wore, he realized that there was no priest in that confessional. It's odd, he thought, that these two beautiful women aren't out at one of the altars of repose if they're so devout, or else in the front row of some balcony, if they're more worldly. But what a fine gown that is! How elegant! And he slowed his steps to get a better look.

The one who was on her knees in the confessional turned her head a little when she heard Julien's footsteps in the great silence. Suddenly she cried out and seemed to be fainting.

Her strength failing her, the lady on her knees began to fall back; her friend, who was very close by, rushed forward to help her. At the same time, Julien caught sight of the shoulders of the lady who had fallen backward. She was wearing a necklace of large natural pearls, a necklace Julien knew very well. How stunned he was to recognize Madame de Rênal's hair! It was her. The woman trying to support her head and keep her from falling was Madame Der-ville. Julien, beside himself, leaped forward; the fall of Madame de Rênal might have pulled her friend down along with her if Julien had not intervened to sup-

port them. He saw Madame de Rênal's head, pale, unconscious, drooping on her shoulder. He helped Madame Derville lay that charming head softly against the back of a straw chair; he was on his knees.

Madame Derville, turning, recognized him.

"Get away, Monsieur, get away!" she said, her voice burning with anger. "She must not see you again. The sight of you is horrible to her—she was so happy before you came! Your conduct is despicable. Go away, far away, if there's any decency left in you."

She said this with such authority, and Julien was so weakened at the moment, that he did move away. She's always hated me, he thought, meaning Madame Derville.

Just then, the nasal chant of the first priests from the procession began to resound within the cathedral; the procession filed in. Father Chas-Bernard called Julien several times, and at first he didn't hear; finally he came up to a pillar where Julien had taken refuge, more dead than alive, and took him by the arm. He wanted to introduce him to the bishop.

"You're not feeling well, my boy," the priest said, seeing him pale and almost unable to walk. "You've been working too hard." The priest gave him his arm. "Come, sit over here on the holy water distributor's little bench, behind me. I'll stand in front of you and hide you." So they were close to the great doors! "Calm yourself. We have a good twenty minutes before Monseigneur arrives. Try to pull yourself together. When he passes by, I'll raise you up—I'm still strong enough, despite my age!"

But when the bishop did appear, Julien was trembling so badly that Father Chas gave up on the idea of introducing him.

"Don't be too disappointed. We'll find another occasion," he said.

That evening, he had ten pounds of candles sent down to the seminary's chapel; they had been saved, he said, by Julien's speed in extinguishing them. But nothing could have been less true. The poor boy himself was extinguished; he hadn't a thought in his head since catching sight of Madame de Rênal.

# FIRST STEP UP

*He knew his era; he knew his département, and he is rich.*

**THE PRÉCURSEUR**<sup>127</sup>

Julien had not yet come out of the profound reverie into which the event in the cathedral had plunged him when the stern Father Pirard sent for him.

“I have here a letter from Father Chas-Bernard speaking well of you. I’m very pleased with your behavior on the whole. You are extremely imprudent, to the point of being stupid, though one wouldn’t suspect that from appearances. Still, you have a good heart, and even a generous one. Your intellect is superior. All in all, I see a spark within you that must not be neglected.

“After fifteen years of work here, I’m on the point of leaving this place. My error was in allowing the seminarians to use their own judgment, and in having neither protected nor attacked that secret society you told me about in the confessional. Before I leave, I want to do something for you. I would have done this two months ago, because you already deserved it then, if it hadn’t been for the accusation concerning that card with the address of Amanda Binet on it that was found in your room. I’m making you instructor in the New and Old Testaments.”

Julien, beside himself with gratitude, thought for a second of falling on his knees and thanking God, but he yielded instead to a more genuine impulse. He walked up to Father Pirard, took his hand, and raised it to his lips.

“What’s this?” cried the director, seeming irritated, but the expression in Julien’s eyes was even more eloquent than his action.

Father Pirard gazed at him with astonishment, like a man who over many long years had lost the habit of encountering the more delicate emotions. The attention overwhelmed the director; his voice weakened.

“Well! Yes, my child, I feel an attachment to you. Heaven knows that it’s

completely against my own will. I must be just and bear neither hatred nor love for any individual. Your career is going to be a difficult one. I see something in you that will always be an offense to vulgar people. Jealousy and calumny will dog your steps. Wherever Providence chooses to set you, your companions will never be able to look at you without hating you. And if they feign love for you, that will only be a means for betraying you more surely later on. No remedy exists for this except one: have recourse to God, and to God only, for he has given you, to chasten your pride, the necessity of being hated. Let your conduct be pure, for that is the only recourse I see available to you. If you hold tightly to the truth with an invincible embrace, sooner or later your enemies will be confounded.”

It had been so long since Julien had heard a friendly voice that we must pardon him this one weakness: he burst into tears. Father Pirard opened his arms; it was an emotional moment for the two of them.

Julien was half-mad with joy: this promotion was the first he had ever had, and the advantages it brought with it were immense. To begin to conceive of this, you would have to have been condemned to spend whole months without so much as a moment’s solitude, and in constant, immediate contact with people who were, at the best, annoying, and at the worst, intolerable. Their shouting alone would have been enough to disorder a delicate temperament. The noisy joys of these peasants, well-fed and warmly dressed, could not simply be expressed, but rather had to be bellowed out with maximum lung power.

But now, Julien was able to eat alone, or almost so, an hour after the rest of the seminarians. He had a key to the garden and could take walks there when it was empty.

To his great astonishment, Julien saw that he was actually hated less now; he had expected, on the contrary, a redoubling of the hatred. His secret wish that they would not speak to him, a desire that had been all too obvious and that had made him so many enemies, was no longer perceived as a mark of absurd pride. In the eyes of those gross creatures who surrounded him, it now showed an appropriate sense of his own dignity. The hatred diminished notice-

ably, especially among the youngest who had now become his pupils, and whom he treated with the greatest courtesy. As time passed he even acquired some supporters; it became bad form to refer to him as Martin Luther.

But why take time to enumerate friends or enemies? All of it is just ugly, and the more accurate the depiction, the uglier it is. Yet these are the only moral teachers the people have, and what would become of them without them? Will the newspaper someday come to take the place of the priest?

Since Julien took on his new position, the director of the seminary purposely avoided speaking to him unless there were witnesses. This was in its way prudent and was in its way wise for both director and disciple; but it was nevertheless a *trial*. The unwavering principle of the strict Jansenist Pirard was: does a man seem to have merit in your eyes? In that case, put obstacles between him and everything he wants and everything he tries to do. If the merit is real, he will figure out how to overcome the obstacles.

Hunting season came. Fouqué had the idea of sending a stag and a boar to the seminary in the name of Julien's family. The dead animals were deposited in the hallway between the kitchen and the refectory, where all the seminarians passed on their way to eat their meals. This was a grand object of curiosity. The boar, dead though it was, frightened the youngest ones; they reached out to touch its tusks. Nobody talked of anything else for a week.

This gift, which reclassified Julien's family into that stratum of society that deserved respect, dealt a mortal blow to the envy. It was simple: wealth confers superiority. Now Chazel and all the most distinguished among the seminarians began to make friendly advances toward him, almost complaining to him that he had not told them about his parents' stature and had thus exposed them to the risk of being disrespectful toward money.

There was a conscription, but Julien, as a seminary student, was exempt. The circumstance disturbed him deeply: There it went—the moment is gone forever, the moment that, twenty years ago, would have set my life on a path toward heroism!

He went for a walk in the garden, where he overheard the conversation of two masons who were at work repairing a wall.

“Well, we’ll have to go—there’s a new conscription.”

“Back in the days of *the other one*,<sup>128</sup> would’ve been nothing wrong with that! You’d see a mason made an officer, then even made a general—it happened.”

“Some difference nowadays! Now only the down-and-out go. Folks with a pile of *what it takes* get to stay home.”

“You’re born poor, you stay poor. That’s all there is to it.”

“Hey, is it true what they say, that the other one is dead?” said a third mason.<sup>129</sup>

“Sure, the fat ones say that, don’t they? The other one scares ’em.”

“What a difference, the way things always went just right back in his day. And when you think he was betrayed by his own marshals! Talk about traitors!”

This conversation consoled Julien somewhat. As he moved on, he repeated with a sigh:

*The only king the people still remember!*<sup>130</sup>

Examination time came. Julien performed brilliantly; he noticed that even Chazel was making an effort to put all his knowledge on display.

On the first day, the examiners appointed by the famous vicar-general de Frilair were very annoyed that they had to keep giving first place, or at worst second, to that Julien Sorel, the Benjamin of Father Pirard.<sup>131</sup> Bets were being laid in the seminary that Julien would take first place in the list, which carried with it the honor of dining with the bishop. But toward the end of one session, which was on the subject of the Church Fathers, one clever examiner began, after having questioned Julien about Saint Jerome and his admiration for Cicero, to speak about Horace, Virgil, and other profane authors. Though his fellows knew nothing of it, Julien had learned by heart a great number of passages by these authors. Carried away by his success, he forgot where he was, and upon the repeated encouragement of the examiner, he proceeded to recite, fervently, several odes by Horace. After allowing him to bury himself ever deeper for twenty minutes, the examiner abruptly changed his expression and



reproached him for having wasted his time on profane studies and ideas that were useless at best and criminal at worst.

"I've been a fool, Monsieur. You are perfectly correct," said Julien with a modest air, recognizing at last the shrewd stratagem that had entrapped him.

The examiner's ruse was considered a dirty trick, even in the seminary, but that did not prevent the abbé de Frilair—that clever man who had been so adroit in organizing the network for the Besançon Congrégation, and whose reports to Paris could make judges, prefects, even the garrison's general staff tremble—from using his powerful hand to place the number 198 next to Julien's name. Doing so gave him the joy of mortifying his old enemy, the Jansenist Pirard.

For ten years now, the great business of his life was to get Pirard out of the position of seminary director. That priest, following the same line of conduct whose principles he had taught to Julien, was sincere, pious, free of intrigue, and devoted to his duties. But a wrathful heaven had dictated that he should have a bilious temperament and be highly sensitive to insults and to hatred. None of the many insults offered to him failed to make its mark on his fiery spirit. He would have resigned a hundred times, but he believed he served a useful purpose in the position where Providence had placed him. I prevent the spread of Jesuitry and idolatry, he told himself.

When the examinations took place, it had been perhaps two months since he had spoken with Julien, but nonetheless when he received the letter announcing the official results and saw the number 198 placed next to the name of the student he considered the glory of the seminary, he was ill for a week. The only consolation the austere priest took was, upon increasing his surveillance of Julien, that he was delighted to find in him neither anger, nor plans for vengeance, nor discouragement.

A few weeks later, Julien trembled when he received a letter; it carried a Paris postmark. So at last, he thought, Madame de Rênal has remembered her promises. But some gentleman signing himself Paul Sorel, claiming to be a relative, had sent him a bill of exchange for five hundred francs. The letter stated

that if Julien continued to study good Latin authors with success, a similar amount would be forthcoming each year.

It's her; it's her generosity! said Julien, touched. She wants to console me. But why not add at least a friendly word or two?

He was wrong about the letter; Madame de Rênal, under the direction of her friend Madame Derville, remained fully sincere in her profound remorse. Despite herself, her thoughts often strayed to the singular being whose appearance in her life had turned it upside down; but she forbade herself to write to him.

Were we to speak in the language of the seminary, we might call this letter with its five hundred francs a miracle, and say that heaven was using Father de Frilair himself as its instrument in making the gift to Julien.

Twelve years before this, Father de Frilair had arrived in Besançon carrying the slimmest possible portmanteau, which—so they say—contained the entirety of his fortune. But now he was one of the wealthiest landowners in the département. On the way to this prosperity, he had bought half of an estate, the other half of which belonged by inheritance to Monsieur de La Mole. This was the beginning of an extensive lawsuit between these two individuals.

Despite his brilliant reputation in Paris and the positions he held at Court, the Marquis de La Mole thought it might be dangerous to get into a fight in Besançon with a vicar-general who was known to make and unmake prefects. Instead of soliciting a payoff of fifty thousand francs, disguised as something else and hidden deep in the account books, and letting Father de Frilair win this puny lawsuit over fifty thousand francs, the marquis took offence. He thought he had right on his side—clear, definite right!

Now, if I may be permitted to say such a thing: where is the judge who doesn't have a son or at least a cousin who needs some help getting ahead in this life?

To explain for those who are genuinely blind: one week after winning his first judgment in the case, the abbé de Frilair climbed up into the bishop's carriage, drove across town, and personally delivered the cross of the Legion of Honor to his lawyer. A little stunned by the effrontery of his adversary, and see-

ing his own legal team weakening, Monsieur de La Mole went to seek advice from Father Chélan, who put him in touch with Monsieur Pirard.

At the time of our story, these relations had been going on for some time. Father Pirard took up the cause with all his customary passion. Meeting endlessly with the lawyers for the marquis, he studied the case and found it just, declaring openly that he was on the side of the Marquis de La Mole against the all-powerful vicar-general. The latter could scarcely believe the insolence, and from a little Jansenist at that!

Just look at this Court nobility, pretending to be so powerful! the abbé de Frilair would say to his close friends. Monsieur de La Mole has not so much as obtained a miserable cross for his lawyer in Besançon, and he's going to let the poor man lose his post. However, friends write me, the great noble peer doesn't let a week go by without showing off his blue sash<sup>132</sup> in the Keeper of the Seals' salon, for whatever good that does him.

Even with all Father Pirard's activity, and even though Monsieur de La Mole was always on the best of terms with the minister of justice, all that he'd been able to achieve in the last six years was to avoid actually losing his case.

In endless correspondence with the abbé Pirard concerning this affair that the two of them so passionately pursued, the marquis ended up taking a liking to the way the abbé thought. Little by little, despite the immense distance between their two social positions, their correspondence took on the tone of a friendship. Father Pirard told the marquis that there was some conspiracy to get him removed from his position through a series of insults. In a fit of rage inspired by this infamous plot that, in order to get at him, had attacked Julien, he told the whole tale to the marquis.

Extremely rich though he was, this great lord was no miser. He had never been able to get Father Pirard to accept so much as reimbursement for the postage he used on the lawsuit. So now he seized on the idea of sending five hundred francs to his favorite student.

Monsieur de La Mole took the trouble to write the cover letter himself. It got him thinking about the abbé.

One day the latter received a short letter claiming to be on a matter of urgent

importance and urging him to hurry at once to an inn on the outskirts of Besançon. When he got there, he found one of Monsieur de La Mole's servants.

"Monsieur le Marquis has ordered me to bring you in his carriage," the man said. "He hopes that after you've read this letter, you'll find it acceptable to travel to Paris in four or five days. I will occupy the time you are good enough to indicate to me by visiting the Franche-Comté estates of Monsieur le Marquis. After that, on the day you stipulate, we'll depart for Paris."

The short letter read as follows:

*My dear sir, toss aside all these provincial squabbles for a while, and come breathe in some fresh air in Paris. I'm sending you my carriage with orders to wait for your decision for four days. I'll wait in Paris for you myself until Tuesday. The only thing needed on your side, Monsieur, is simply to say yes for me to accept, in your name, one of the very best livings around Paris. The wealthiest of your future parishioners has never actually seen you, but he is more devoted to you than you can imagine—that is myself, the Marquis de La Mole.*

Without quite realizing it, the stern Father Pirard loved this seminary, peopled as it was with his enemies, to which he had devoted fifteen years, and upon which he had focused all his thinking. This letter from Monsieur de La Mole was like the sudden appearance of a surgeon, come to perform a painful but necessary operation. His dismissal was a certainty. He told the servant he would meet him in three days.

The next forty-eight hours saw him in a fever of uncertainty. Finally, he wrote to Monsieur de La Mole, and then composed a letter for the bishop, a masterpiece of ecclesiastical style, though a bit on the long side. It would have been difficult to find phrasings more irreproachable, or redolent of a sincerer respect. Yet this letter was designed to give Father de Frilair a very difficult hour with regard to his patron, for it articulated every single one of the grounds for serious complaint, descending all the way down to the most detailed examples of cheap harassment over the past six years that were forcing Father Pirard to leave the diocese.

Firewood was stolen from his woodpile; his dog had been poisoned, etc., etc.

When the letter was finished, he went to awaken Julien, asleep already at eight o'clock, as were all the other seminarians.

"You know the bishop's palace?" he asked him in the finest Latin. "Take this letter to him. I must warn you that I'm sending you out among wolves. Keep your eyes and your ears open. Nothing but the truth in your responses, but consider that whoever is questioning you might be someone for whom doing you harm would be a real joy. I'm comfortable, my child, in giving you this experience before leaving you, because I don't want to hide anything from you: I'm resigning my position."

Julien sat still; he felt affection for Father Pirard. It was futile for Prudence to speak to him:

"Once this upright man is gone, the Sacred Heart party will demote me, and maybe even expel me."

But he could not think of himself. What embarrassed him now was trying to find a way to phrase something he wanted to say, and he couldn't summon the intelligence to find a polite way to do it.

"Well, come on, my friend. Aren't you going to go?"

"People say, Monsieur," Julien said timidly, "that during your long administration you've never put anything aside. I have six hundred francs."

Tears prevented him from going on.

"*This too is duly noted*," said the ex-director of the seminary coldly. "Now go to the bishop. It's getting late."

Chance would have it that on this evening, the abbé de Frilair was in charge at the bishop's palace; Monseigneur was dining with the prefect. And thus it was to Monsieur de Frilair himself that Julien delivered the letter, though he didn't know it.

Julien watched with astonishment as the priest boldly opened the letter addressed to the bishop. The vicar-general's handsome face showed surprise mixed with lively pleasure, and then assumed an even graver look. While he read, Julien, struck by the man's good looks, took the time to examine him. The

face would have had more solemnity about it if it weren't for the extraordinary subtlety in some of the features, a subtlety that would almost have suggested dishonesty if its owner were not so careful to keep it under control at all times. The sharply protruding nose formed a perfectly straight line, which unfortunately lent the profile a distinct, vivid likeness to the face of a fox. Moreover, this priest, who seemed so absorbed in Monsieur Pirard's resignation, was clothed with an elegance that pleased Julien and that he had never observed in any other priest.

It was only much later that Julien discovered what the abbé de Frilair's special talent was: he knew how to amuse his bishop, an amiable old man who was born to live in Paris and who regarded Besançon as exile. The bishop had very poor eyesight and was passionately fond of fish. Father de Frilair picked out the bones from the fish served to Monseigneur.

Julien stood silently watching the abbé continue reading the resignation, when all of a sudden the door burst noisily open. A richly uniformed lackey strode through rapidly. Julien barely had time to turn and face the door; he saw there a little old man wearing a pectoral cross. He prostrated himself: the bishop gave him a pleasant smile and passed by. The handsome abbé followed him, and Julien was left alone in the salon, where he was free to look around and admire the pious magnificence of the place.

The bishop of Besançon, a man of strong character who had been tried but not defeated by the long miseries of the Emigration,<sup>13</sup> was now seventy-five years old, and felt an infinite indifference as to what might happen in the next ten years.

"Who was that seminarian with the clever look about him that I thought I saw just now?" asked the bishop. "Aren't they all supposed to be in bed by now?"

"Oh, this one is wide awake, I promise you, Monseigneur, and he comes bringing great news: the resignation of the only Jansenist remaining in your diocese. That terrible Abbé Pirard has finally read the writing on the wall."

"Is that so?" said the bishop with a laugh. "I defy you to find a man of his

caliber to replace him. And just to prove to you the worth of the man, I'll invite him to dine with me tomorrow."

The vicar-general wanted to slip in a few words regarding his successor. But the prelate, little disposed to talk business, said:

"Before we bring in a new one, let's try to find out why this one is leaving. Bring me that seminarian. Out of the mouths of babes we learn the truth."

Julien was summoned. I'm going to be trapped between two inquisitors, he thought. Never in his life had he felt more courage.

When he entered the room, two tall valets, each of them better dressed than Monsieur Valenod himself, were in the process of undressing Monseigneur. The prelate, before opening up the subject of Monsieur Pirard, thought he would question Julien about his studies. He spoke a little about dogma and was pleasantly surprised. Then he turned to the humanities, to Virgil, Horace, and Cicero. "Those are the names," thought Julien, "that earned me an exam rank of 198. But I've got nothing to lose. Let's try to shine a little." And he did; the prelate, an excellent humanist himself, was enchanted.

At his dinner that evening at the prefecture, a justly celebrated young woman had recited the poem *Magdeleine*.<sup>134</sup> The bishop felt like talking about literature, and he soon forgot all about Father Pirard and his affairs, in order to discuss with this young seminarian the question of whether Horace had been rich or poor. The prelate quoted from several odes, but his memory was weak, and Julien stepped in immediately to recite the entire ode, and he did it with a modest air. What struck the bishop was that Julien always maintained the right tone for the conversation: he recited his twenty or thirty Latin verses just as he would have narrated what was happening in his seminary. They spoke at length about Virgil, about Cicero. Finally, the prelate could not help but compliment the young seminarian.

"It would be impossible to benefit more from your studies."

"Ah, Monseigneur," said Julien, "your seminary can furnish you with one hundred and ninety-seven students more worthy of your praise."

"How do you mean?" asked the prelate, puzzled by that number.

“I can provide official proof of what I have the honor to tell Monseigneur.

“At the annual examination at the seminary, when I talked about the very subjects which now have earned me this moment of approval from Monseigneur, I received 198th place.”

“Oh! You’re the Benjamin of Father Pirard,” exclaimed the bishop, laughing and looking over at Monsieur de Frilair. “We should have expected this. It’s fair play. But,” he added, turning to Julien, “didn’t they have to wake you up to send you over here?”

“Yes, Monseigneur. I’ve only been outside the seminary once before, and that was to help Father Chas-Bernard decorate the cathedral for Corpus Christi.”

“*Optime*,” said the bishop. “So that was you, was it, who showed such bravery in getting those ornaments up on top of the baldachin? It makes me shudder every year. I’m afraid it’s going to cost us some man’s life. My friend, you’ll go far—but I don’t want to put an end to your career, which is going to be a brilliant one, by making you die of hunger.”

And upon the bishop’s command, biscuits and Malaga wine were brought in; Julien did well by them, and the abbé de Frilair even more so, for he knew that his bishop liked to see people showing a good appetite and enjoying a meal.

The prelate, growing more and more pleased with the way his evening was turning out, spoke for a moment about ecclesiastical history. He saw that Julien didn’t understand. The prelate turned to the moral condition of the Roman Empire under the emperors of Constantine’s century. The end of the pagan era was accompanied by that same spirit of disquiet and doubt that, in the nineteenth century, troubles the gloomy, jaded minds of our day. Monseigneur noticed that Julien hardly knew even the name of Tacitus.

Julien responded candidly that this author was not to be found in the seminary library.

“That makes me happy,” said the bishop with a smile, “because it resolves a little problem for me. For the last ten minutes, I’ve been seeking some way of thanking you for the pleasant evening you’ve given me, which was certainly unanticipated. I never expected to find such scholarship in one of my semi-



nary's pupils. So, although the gift may not be quite canonical, I want to give you a Tacitus."

The prelate had an eight-volume set, all superbly bound, brought out. He wanted to write an inscription on the title page of the first volume, a fine Latin compliment for Julien Sorel; the bishop prided himself on his impeccable Latin. He then took on a more serious tone, marking an abrupt contrast with the rest of the conversation:

"Young man, *if you are wise*, you will one day have the finest parish in my diocese, and not one located a hundred leagues from the bishop's palace either. But you must *be wise*."

Julien carried off his volumes in a state of astonishment as the clock struck midnight.

Monseigneur had not said one word to him about the abbé Pirard. Julien was especially surprised by the extraordinary civility of the bishop. He had never imagined he would find such urbanity of style combined with such a natural dignity. The contrast struck him again when he encountered, impatiently waiting for him, the stern abbé Pirard.

"*Quid tibi dixerunt?*" (What did they say to you?), he shouted at him the minute he caught sight of him.

Julien fumbled a bit in trying to translate the bishop's discourse into Latin.

"Speak French, and tell me the exact words Monseigneur used, and don't add anything or omit anything either," said the ex-director of the seminary in his customary harsh tone and his deeply inelegant manner.

"What a strange present for a bishop to give a young seminarian!" he said, fingering the superb Tacitus, whose gilded edges seemed to appall him.

Two o'clock sounded when, after a fully detailed report, he allowed his pupil to go back to his room.

"Leave me the first volume of your Tacitus, the one with the compliment from the bishop," he said. "That line may turn out to be your lightning rod in this place after I've gone."

"*Erit tibi, fili mi, successor meus tanquam leo quoderens quem devoret*" (My son, my successor will be to you as a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour).<sup>135</sup>

The next morning, Julien thought there was something strange in the way his fellow students spoke to him. He became only more reserved. Here it is already, he thought, the effect of Father Pirard's resignation. The news has spread all over the school, and they think I'm his favorite. There must be some insult implied in this new tone of theirs. But he was unable to put his finger on it. On the contrary, there was no hatred in the eyes of everyone he encountered as he passed through the dormitories. What is this? he wondered. It must be some sort of trap; let's keep our cards close to our chest. But then the little seminarian from Verrières said to him with a laugh, "*Cornelii Taciti opera omnia*" (the complete works of Tacitus).

The remark was overheard, and they all seemed to be competing in congratulating Julien, not just regarding the magnificent gift he had received from Monseigneur, but also for the honor of the two-hour conversation he had been granted. It was all widely known, down to the smallest details. From that moment on, all the envy ceased, and they began to pay abject court to him. Even the abbé Castanède, who, just the day before, had treated him with the utmost insolence, now came over, took his arm, and invited him to dine.

It was a weakness in Julien's character that the insolence of these vile creatures had caused him a great deal of pain; their abjection now disgusted him and gave him no pleasure.

Toward noon, Father Pirard bade farewell to his pupils, not without a stern admonition to them. "Which do you want?" he asked them. "Do you want worldly honors, all the social advantages, the pleasures of giving orders, of mocking the laws, and of being insolent to those around you with no repercussions? Or do you want your eternal salvation? Even the dumbest among you only need to open your eyes to see the difference between the two paths."

He had no sooner left than the devotees of the Sacred Heart of Jesus went off to chant a Te Deum in the chapel. Not one of the seminarians took seriously what the ex-director had said. He's upset about being dismissed, they all said. Not one of the seminarians had the simplicity to believe that his resignation was voluntary, especially considering that the position provided so many opportunities to make deals with major contractors.

The abbé Pirard moved into Besançon's finest inn; and under the pretext of seeing to some nonexistent business matters, planned to stay there two days.

The bishop had invited him to dinner, and to needle his vicar-general, he tried to make him shine. They were eating their dessert when the strange news arrived from Paris that the abbé Pirard had been nominated to the magnificent living of N\*\*\*, four leagues from the capital. The good bishop congratulated him sincerely. He could see that some *shrewd moves* had been going on behind the scenes, and this put him in good humor, giving him the highest opinion of the abbé's talents. He gave him a magnificent certificate in Latin and told the abbé de Frilair to be silent when he tried to protest.

That evening, Monseigneur took his admiration along with him when he visited the Marquise de Rubempré's salon. The whole business was fascinating news to Besançon's higher society; they were all speculating about this extraordinary favor. They could already see Father Pirard becoming a bishop. The cleverest suspected that Monsieur de La Mole had been named a minister, and they allowed themselves to smile that evening at the pretentious airs the abbé de Frilair put on when he went out into society.

The next morning, Father Pirard was practically followed in the streets, and tradesmen came to stand in their doorways when he went to lobby the magistrates assigned to the marquis's lawsuit. For the first time, they all received him civilly. The stern Jansenist, indignant at seeing all this, had a long conference with the legal team he had selected for the Marquis de La Mole, and then left for Paris. He was weak enough to aver, to two or three of his old school friends who escorted him to the carriage, admiring its coat of arms, that after having run the seminary for fifteen years, he was now leaving Besançon with five hundred and twenty francs in savings. His friends embraced him, tears in their eyes, and then later said to each other, our good abbé really ought to have spared us that lie; it's simply too ridiculous.

The vulgar, blinded by their love of money, were not capable of understanding that it was Father Pirard's very sincerity that had given him the strength to fight, all on his own, for six years, Marie Alacoque and the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Jesuits, and his own bishop.<sup>136</sup>

# THE AMBITIOUS

*There's really only one true title of nobility, that of duke; that of marquis is ridiculous; people only take note when it's a duke.*

EDINBURGH REVIEW<sup>137</sup>

The Marquis de La Mole received Abbé Pirard with none of those little mannerisms that great lords like to affect, which are so polished yet wounding to those capable of understanding them for what they are. Such things would have been a waste of time, and the marquis was sufficiently busy with serious affairs that he had no time to waste.

For six months, he had been intriguing to get both the king and the nation to accept a certain minister who, in turn, would make him a duke.

For long years the marquis had, in vain, been asking his Besançon lawyer for a clear, accurate report on the lawsuit in the Franche-Comté. But how could the celebrated lawyer give him such an explanation, when he didn't understand it himself?

The little square sheet of paper the abbé handed him explained everything.

"My dear abbé," said the marquis, after having got through, in under five minutes, all the polite formulations and the customary inquiries about one's personal state. "My dear abbé, in the midst of this apparent prosperity of mine, I find myself unable to attend seriously to a pair of seemingly minor but important matters: my family and my business affairs. I tend to the fortunes of my house, and I tend to them well. I devote great care to my personal pleasures, and they take precedence over everything else, or at least that's how I see it," he added, noticing the surprise in Father Pirard's eyes. Though he was a sensible man, he still marveled at the thought of an old man speaking so candidly about his pleasures.

“Of course, there are people one can hire in Paris,” the great lord continued, “but you find them perched up on the fifth floor somewhere, and as soon as I take a man on, he rents an apartment on the second, and his wife sets up an ‘at home’ day. The result is no more work, except what’s required to keep up the appearance of being a fashionable man. Once they get their bread, that’s the only other thing that matters.

“For my lawsuit, or rather lawsuits, I mean, for each of them separately, I have lawyers working themselves to death. I had one die just the other day of a chest ailment. But for my other affairs in general, would you believe, Monsieur, that for the last three years I’ve given up on finding a man who, when he writes to or for me, will deign to give at least the slightest attention to what he’s saying? But all this is just a preface.

“I respect you, and I dare to add, even though we are meeting today for the very first time, that I like you. Would you be willing to be my secretary, with a salary of eight thousand francs a year—or, if you’d like, double that amount?”

The abbé refused, but as the conversation progressed, seeing the genuine difficulty the marquis was in suggested an idea to him. “I left behind in the seminary an impoverished young man who, unless I’m fooling myself, is going to be undergoing some serious persecution. Indeed, if he were only a simple monk, they would already have him *in pace*.<sup>138</sup>

“So far, all this young man knows is Latin and Holy Scripture, but it’s not impossible that someday he’ll be using his considerable talents for preaching or the care of souls. I don’t know what he’ll do, but he has the sacred fire in him, and he might go far. I was planning on handing him over to our bishop, if one ever came along who had your way of seeing people and their affairs.”

“Where does your young man come from?” the marquis asked.

“He’s said to be the son of a carpenter from our mountain region, but I’ve always suspected he’s the natural son of some wealthy man. I recently saw him receive an anonymous, or pseudonymous, letter enclosing a bill of exchange for five hundred francs.”

“Ah! It’s Julien Sorel,” said the marquis.

“How did you know his name?” asked the startled abbé, blushing at his question.

“That’s something I won’t tell you,” the marquis replied.

“Well, then!” said the abbé. “You could try to hire him as your secretary. He has energy and intelligence and, in short, it’s worth a try.”

“Why not?” said the marquis. “But do you think he’d be vulnerable to bribes from the prefect of police or anybody else to spy on my doings? That’s my only concern.”

After Father Pirard gave him assurances, the marquis took out a thousand-franc note.

“Send this to Julien Sorel to cover his journey here to me.”

“It’s obvious that you live in Paris,” said Father Pirard. “You have no idea of the tyranny that oppresses us poor provincials, and in particular priests who aren’t on friendly terms with the Jesuits. They would never let Julien Sorel go. They’d come up with the most unanswerable objections, tell me he’s sick, or that the letters were never delivered, et cetera, et cetera.”

“I’ll get the minister to write a letter to the bishop,” said the marquis.

“I almost forgot one precaution,” said the abbé. “Though the young man was lowly born, he has a proud heart, and you’ll never succeed if you ruffle his pride. You’d only turn him stupid.”

“I like that,” said the marquis. “I’ll make him my son’s companion—do you think that will work?”

Sometime after this, Julien received a letter with unfamiliar handwriting, postmarked Châlons; in it, he found a check payable from a merchant in Besançon and instructions to go to Paris at once. It was signed by an assumed name, but opening the envelope made Julien tremble: out of it fell a leaf from a tree, which was the signal he had agreed to with Father Pirard.

Less than an hour later, Julien received a summons from the bishop, who received him with paternal warmth. Even while continuing to quote Horace, Monseigneur paid him compliments on the high destiny that awaited him in Paris, worded in such a way as to encourage him to provide an explanation by

way of thanks. But Julien could say nothing, because he knew nothing, and Monseigneur showed great consideration for him. One of the lower-level priests in the bishop's palace wrote to the mayor, who hurried over in person to deliver a signed passport, with the bearer's name left blank.

Before midnight that evening, Julien was at Fouqué's home; his friend was more astonished than delighted at the future that appeared to be awaiting Julien.

"You'll end up," said that Liberal elector, "with a government post that will push you into some shameful act that the newspapers will all write up. And that's how I'll hear news of you. Just remember that even from a purely financial viewpoint, it's a better thing to earn a thousand louis by honest commerce in lumber, and to be your own master, than to be paid four thousand francs from a government, even if it was headed by Solomon himself."

Julien saw in all that only the typical small-mindedness of country people. He was going to make his appearance, at last, on the stage where great deeds were done. The joy of going to Paris, which he imagined as populated with brilliant minds, all scheming and hypocritical, but all just as civilized and polished as the bishop of Besançon and the bishop of Agde, eclipsed everything else in his eyes. For his friend's benefit, he acted as if he had no say in the matter, and that he had to do what Father Pirard's letter commanded.

Around noon on the next day he arrived in Verrières, the happiest of all men; he planned on seeing Madame de Rênal. He went first to visit his first protector, the good Father Chélan. But he found a stern reception there.

"You would agree, would you not, that you owe me a great deal?" Monsieur Chélan said, without even responding to his greeting. "Very well: you're going to dine with me, during which time another horse will be readied for you, and you're going to leave Verrières *without seeing or talking to anyone else*."

"To hear is to obey," Julien replied, with his best seminarian's expression, and from then on the only topics were theology and Latin scholarship.

He mounted his horse and rode for a league, at which point he came to a forest and, since no one was around to see him, he went in and hid there. At

sunset, he sent the horse back to town. Later, he entered a peasant's house and talked him into selling him a ladder and helping him carry it down to the little wood that overhung the Cours de la Fidélité in Verrières.

"This is some deserter . . . or maybe a smuggler," said the peasant to himself when he left him, "but who cares? My ladder went for a good price, and I've had occasion to *move* a few goods in my day too."

The night was a black one. Around one in the morning, Julien, carrying his ladder, entered Verrières. He made his way down into the bed of the stream that runs through Monsieur de Rênal's magnificent gardens, at a depth of ten feet, passing in a channel between two walls. Julien passed over easily with the aid of the ladder. How will the dogs react to me? he wondered. That's the main difficulty. The dogs started barking and running toward him, but they sniffed at him gently and rubbed up against him.

Climbing up from terrace to terrace, though all the gates were locked, it was easy for him to arrive right under Madame de Rênal's bedroom window, which, on the garden side, was no more than eight or ten feet above the ground.

The shutters had a small opening in the shape of a heart, and Julien knew it well. But to his great annoyance, there was no lit candle inside illuminating the opening.

Good God! he said to himself. If tonight is the one night Madame de Rênal isn't occupying this room! Where would she be sleeping? The family is here in Verrières, the presence of the dogs tells me that. But without a light, what if I were to meet Monsieur de Rênal himself, or some stranger, in this room without a night light—and then what a scandal!

The prudent thing would be to depart, but the idea horrified Julien. If it's a stranger, I can run out at top speed and leave the ladder behind. But if it's her, what kind of reception will I get? She's slipped into repentance and the deepest piety, no doubt about it. At the same time, she must remember me at least somewhat, since she wrote to me. The latter thought determined him.

His heart trembling, but resolved to see her or die trying, he tossed some little pebbles up at the shutter—no response. He set his ladder up next to the window, climbed up and tapped on the shutter—gently at first, then more



firmly. Dark as it is, still somebody could take a pistol shot at me, thought Julien. That thought turned his mad endeavor into a test of courage.

The room must be unoccupied tonight, he thought, but if someone is in there, she must be awake by now. So I don't need to worry about who it is. I just need to try not to let myself be heard by anybody sleeping in the other rooms.

He climbed down, placed his ladder up against one of the shutters, climbed back up, and when he passed his hand through the heart-shaped opening, he was lucky enough to find, almost at once, the wire attached to the latch that closed the shutter. I have to open it little by little, and get her to recognize my voice. He opened the shutter just enough to get his head in, and repeated, in a soft voice, "*It's a friend.*"

He listened carefully, but nothing disturbed the profound silence of the room. But there was definitely no night-light, not even a half-extinguished one, at the fireplace; that was not a good sign.

Watch out for a gunshot! He paused to think a moment; then, with his finger, he began to tap on the glass. No response; he tapped harder. Even if I break the window, I have to see this through. As he was tapping more loudly, he thought he could just make out, against the extreme darkness inside, something like a pale shadow crossing the room. Soon there was no doubt about it: he saw a shadow that seemed to be coming toward him, but extremely slowly. Abruptly he saw a cheek pressing up against the glass, where his eye was.

He shuddered and backed up a little. But the night was so dark that even at this distance he couldn't make out whether it was Madame de Rênal. He feared that she might cry out; he could hear the dogs prowling and growling around the foot of his ladder. It's me, he said, a little louder now, a friend. No response. The white phantom had disappeared. Please open the window. I have to talk with you—I'm so miserable! And with that he knocked hard enough to break the window.

He heard a little sound: the latch on the window was lifted. He pushed it open and leaped lightly into the room.

The white phantom moved away; he caught it in his arms; it was a woman.

All his bold plans evaporated now. If it's her, what am I going to say? Imagine his state when he heard a little cry and knew it was Madame de Rênal.

He clutched her tightly in his arms; she shuddered and scarcely had enough strength to push him back.

"Wretch! What are you doing here?"

The convulsion in her voice barely allowed her to articulate those words. Julien saw she was moved by the most genuine indignation.

"I've come to see you, after a cruel fourteen months' separation."

"Get out of here—leave this instant! Oh, Monsieur Chélan, why did you keep me from writing to him? I could have prevented this horror." Now she pushed him away with a startling strength. "I repent of my crime. Heaven has deigned to enlighten me," she repeated, her voice breaking. "Leave! Get out!"

"After fourteen months of misery, I am certainly not going to leave without talking to you. I want to know everything you've done. I've loved you enough. I deserve to know . . . I want to know everything."

Despite herself, that tone of authority took control of Madame de Rênal's heart.

Julien, holding her in a passionate embrace, resisting her efforts to get free, now relaxed his hold a little, and that loosening gave a little reassurance to Madame de Rênal.

"I'm going to pull up the ladder," he said, "so we won't be compromised if some servant has been awakened and makes his rounds."

"No, no, just leave instead," she said, in a genuine rage. "What do I care about men? God can see this hideous scene you're forcing on me, and he will punish me. You're abusing, like a coward, the feelings I used to have for you, but I don't feel them anymore. Do you understand that, Monsieur Julien?"

He drew up the ladder, very slowly so as to make no noise.

"Is your husband in town?" he asked, not to defy her, but carried away by old habits.

"Don't speak to me like that,<sup>139</sup> I beg you, or I'll call my husband. I'm already only too guilty for not having chased you away at once, no matter who heard.

I had pity on you,” she added, hoping to wound his pride, which she knew to be tender.

Her refusal to use the familiar form of address, that brusque way of breaking off such tender ties, ties he still counted on, wrought Julien up into an almost delirious outburst of love for her.

“What? Is it possible you don’t love me anymore?” he asked, in the kind of voice that seems to spring directly from the heart, the kind of voice so difficult to resist.

She said nothing; he began to weep bitterly.

He had really lost all his strength to speak.

“So the one person who ever loved me has forgotten me! What’s the good of going on living after this?” All his bravery had vanished when it was clear he didn’t have to fear encountering a man; everything had vanished from his heart, except love.

He wept silently for a long time. He took her hand, and she tried to pull it back; but after a few almost convulsive movements, she left it in his. The darkness was total. They found themselves sitting next to each other on Madame de Rênal’s bed.

What a difference from the way things were fourteen months ago, thought Julien, and his tears increased. Absence really does destroy all human feelings!

“Please, would you do me the kindness of telling me what’s happened to you?” Julien said at last, embarrassed by his silence, his voice choking with tears.

“I’m certain,” Madame de Rênal replied, her voice unfriendly and reproachful toward Julien, “that all my foolish deeds were known all over town when you left. You were so reckless, so imprudent! Sometime later, when I was in despair, that respectable man, Monsieur Chélan, came to see me. It took a long time before I would agree to making my confession. One day, he had the idea of taking me to the church in Dijon, where I’d made my First Communion. There, he was bold enough to open the subject—” Madame de Rênal broke off, weeping. “Oh, what a moment of shame! I confessed everything. That

good man was so kind to me that instead of hurling his indignation at me, he actually shared in my pain. In those days, I was writing letters to you every day, and never dared to send them. I would hide them carefully, and when my misery grew too much for me, I would lock myself in my room and reread my letters.

“Eventually, Monsieur Chélan persuaded me to let him have them . . . There were a few, the ones written with a little more prudence, that I sent to you. You never replied—not once.”

“Never—I swear to you—never did I receive a letter from you at the seminary.”

“Good God! Who intercepted them?”

“Try to imagine the sorrow I felt. Until that day I saw you in the cathedral, I didn’t even know whether you were still alive.”

“God gave me the grace to comprehend how great my sins against him were, and against my children, and against my husband,” replied Madame de Rênal. “He’s never loved me the way I used to believe you loved me . . .”

Julien flung himself into her arms, with no agenda or plan, overcome with emotion. But Madame de Rênal pushed him away, continuing in a firm voice:

“My good, respectable friend Monsieur Chélan made me understand that in marrying Monsieur de Rênal, I had pledged to him all my affections, even those I had not been aware of, and that I had never felt before this fatal liaison . . . Since I made the great sacrifice of those letters, which had been so dear to me, my life has flowed along, if not happily, then at least somewhat peacefully. Do not trouble it, be a friend to me . . . be the best of my friends.” Julien covered her hands with kisses; she could feel that he was still weeping. “Stop crying. You’re hurting me so much . . . Now, you tell me everything you’ve been doing.” Julien could not speak. “I want to hear about your life in the seminary,” she repeated, “and then you can go.”

Hardly thinking about what he was saying, Julien talked about the endless intrigues and resentments that he had encountered, and then about his more tranquil life after he had been made an instructor.

“That was when,” he went on, “after that long silence, which was no doubt supposed to make me understand that you no longer loved me and that you had become completely indifferent to me . . .” Madame de Rênal squeezed his hands. “That was when you sent me that five hundred francs.”

“No, never,” said Madame de Rênal.

“It was in a letter postmarked from Paris, and signed Paul Sorel, to avoid arousing any suspicions.”

This began a brief discussion as to where the letter might have originated. The atmosphere now started to change. Without knowing it, Madame de Rênal and Julien had left behind their solemn tone; they had begun to speak to each other tenderly, like friends. They still could see nothing in the extreme darkness, but the sound of her voice said everything. Julien passed his arm around his friend’s waist; this was a move fraught with danger. She tried to remove Julien’s arm but he, not without skill, diverted her attention with an interesting detail in his narrative. The arm was forgotten, and it remained in position.

After many conjectures as to the origin of the letter with the five hundred francs, Julien returned to his narrative; he got a bit more control over himself as he spoke about his past life, for it interested him a great deal less than what was happening at the present moment. He focused his attention on how this visit was to conclude. She repeated, from time to time, “Go on now, leave” in a curt voice.

How shameful for me if I’m thrown out! The remorse over that would poison the rest of my life, he said to himself. She’ll never write to me. And God knows when I’ll be back in this region! From that moment, all that was heavenly in Julien’s position abruptly fled from his heart. Sitting next to the woman he adored, almost having her clasped in his arms, here in this room where he had had such happiness, in perfect darkness, well aware that she had begun weeping softly, feeling from the movements of her breast, that she was sobbing, he was fool enough to turn cold, calculating politician, as cold and calculating as when, in the seminary’s courtyard he heard himself being

mocked by some other seminarian who was stronger than he. Julien drew out his narrative, describing how wretched his life had become since leaving Verrières. So, Madame de Rênal said to herself, after a year's absence, deprived of even a single token to jog his memories, while I was forgetting him, he was thinking only of the happy days he had passed at Vergy. Her sobs grew stronger. Julien sensed that his narration had succeeded. He realized that he now had to deploy his final weapon: he abruptly brought up the subject of the letter he had received from Paris.

"I've taken my leave of Monseigneur, the bishop."

"What! You mean you're not going back to Besançon? You're leaving us forever?"

"Yes," Julien replied, his tone resolute. "Yes, I'll be leaving the place where I've been forgotten by the one person I've loved in my whole life, leaving her, never to see her again. I'm going to Paris . . ."

"You're going to Paris!" Madame de Rênal cried, out loud.<sup>140</sup>

Her tears nearly choked off her voice, revealing the extremity of her emotion. Julien needed that encouragement: he was about to take a step that might turn everything against him; and before that exclamation, unable to see anything in the dark, he had no idea of the effect he was managing to produce. Now he hesitated no longer; the fear of the remorse he would feel if he didn't do it allowed him to gain complete control over himself. He added, coldly, as he stood up:

"Yes, Madame, I'm leaving you forever. Now you can be happy. Farewell."

He stepped over toward the window and quickly had it opened. Madame de Rênal rushed over to him and threw herself into his arms.

And so, after three hours of conversation, Julien got what he had so passionately wanted for the first two. Had this happened earlier, Madame de Rênal's burst of feeling and the eclipse of her remorse would have been a divine happiness for him; but having been obtained only by deploying so much artifice, it was merely a pleasure. Julien insisted, over his lover's objections, on lighting a candle.

He said to her, “Do you want to deprive me of every memory of having seen you? The love that no doubt glows in those charming eyes—it will be lost forever for me? The whiteness of this pretty hand—I’ll never see it? Remember, I’m leaving you, perhaps for a very long time!”

Madame de Rênal couldn’t refuse anymore; the thought of his leaving reduced her to tears. But now the dawn was beginning to paint in the contours of the pines up on the mountain east of Verrières. Instead of leaving, Julien, intoxicated with the sensuality of the moment, asked Madame de Rênal if he could stay the whole day, hiding in her room, and not leave until the following night.

“Well, why not?” she replied. “This new relapse of mine is fatal. It leaves me with no self-respect, and it’s already sealed my eternal unhappiness,” she said, pressing him to her heart. “My husband isn’t the same: he’s always suspicious. He thinks I’ve been duping him all along, and he’s always angry with me. If he hears the slightest sound, I’m lost. He’ll throw me out, like the wretch I am.”

“Ah, that’s Monsieur Chélan talking,” said Julien. “You didn’t talk to me like that on the cruel day I was going off to that seminary. Then you loved me.”

Julien said this coolly, and he was rewarded when he saw his lover immediately forget the danger her husband represented, in favor of the greater danger of seeing Julien doubt her love. Daylight was growing brighter, lighting up the whole room; Julien felt all the sensual joy of pride when he was able to see in his arms, almost at his feet, this charming woman, the only one he had ever loved, who only a few hours ago was possessed by holy fear of an angry God and an obsession with her duties. All the resolutions she had formed during a year of absence were unable to fend off his boldness.

Soon they heard sounds in the house; one thing she had forgotten now troubled Madame de Rênal.

“That wicked Élisabeth will come into the room. What am I going to do with that enormous ladder?” she said to her lover. “Where can I hide it? Ah—I’ll take it up to the attic!” she exclaimed suddenly, joy in her voice.

“But you’ll have to go through the valet’s room,” said Julien, astonished.

“I’ll set the ladder down in the corridor first, and then I’ll call the valet and give him some task to go do.”

“Be sure to have a story ready in case the valet comes out and sees the ladder in the corridor.”

“Yes, my angel,” said Madame de Rênal, kissing him. “Now you’d better get yourself hidden away under the bed, in case Élisabeth comes in while I’m gone.”

Julien was astonished at all this sudden gaiety. So, he thought, when real danger approaches, far from paralyzing her, it makes her cheerful, because it drives out all her remorse! Truly a superior woman! Ah, reigning over a heart like that is really a glorious thing! Julien was delighted.

Madame de Rênal picked up the ladder; it was evidently too heavy for her. Julien came to her aid; he was admiring that elegant figure that concealed so much strength, when suddenly she lifted the ladder as if it weighed no more than a small chair. She carried it quickly out into the corridor on the third floor, laying it down against the wall. She called the valet, and, giving him enough time to finish dressing, she went up into the dovecote. When she returned five minutes later, the ladder was gone. What happened to it? If Julien had not been inside the house, this wouldn’t have mattered to her. But given the way things were, if her husband were to see this ladder . . . the scene would be abominable. Madame de Rênal rushed all over the house. Finally, she found the ladder under the roof, where the valet had taken it and even hidden it. How strange it was! It would have been alarming any other time.

But what do I care, she said to herself, about anything that happens twenty-four hours from now, when Julien will have gone? Won’t everything be alarming then, everything horror and remorse?

A vague idea about suicide passed through her mind, but she dismissed it, asking herself, what does it matter? After a separation that she had thought was an eternal one, he had returned to her, he had seen her again, and the lengths he had gone to in order to see her showed such proof of his love!

She told Julien the story of the ladder:

“What will I tell my husband, if the valet tells him he found that ladder?”



She thought for a moment. "It'll take them twenty-four hours to find the peasant who sold it to you," and then, throwing herself into Julien's arms and embracing him convulsively, "Oh, to die like this! To die!" she cried, covering him with kisses. "Oh—but you must be dying of hunger!" she said, laughing.

"Come, I'll hide you first in Madame Derville's room. It's always locked." She took up a position as lookout at the end of the corridor, and Julien rushed over to the room. "Be sure not to open the door, in case anybody knocks," she told him, turning the key in the lock. "If you hear anything, it'll only be the children playing among themselves."

"Have them go out into the garden, below the window," said Julien, "so I'll have the pleasure of seeing them. Get them to talk too."

"Yes, yes!" cried Madame de Rênal as she left.

She returned soon with some oranges, biscuits, and a bottle of Malaga wine; she had been unable to get any bread.

"What's your husband doing?" Julien asked.

"He's writing up some sales contracts with some peasants."

But eight o'clock had struck, and now there was a great deal of noise in the house. If Madame de Rênal didn't make an appearance, they would come looking for her everywhere; she would have to leave him. Soon she returned, defying all prudence, bringing him a cup of coffee; she shuddered at the thought of him dying of hunger. After lunch, she managed to get the children to come below the window of Madame Derville's room. He thought they had grown a great deal, but they now looked more common, or perhaps his ideas of them had changed. Madame de Rênal spoke to them about Julien. The older boy spoke about him in a friendly way, missing his departed tutor, but the younger ones had all but forgotten him.

Monsieur de Rênal did not go out that morning; he was endlessly going up and down the stairs, busy with his deals with the peasants, to whom he was selling his potato harvest. Until dinner, Madame de Rênal did not find a moment to spare for her prisoner. The bell rang for dinner, and she thought she would try to steal away a bowl of hot soup for him. As she was nearing his room, carefully carrying the bowl, she came face-to-face with the servant who had

hidden the ladder that morning. At that moment, he was advancing likewise soundlessly, seeming to be listening for something. Probably Julien had imprudently made some sound. The servant moved off, looking a little confused. Madame de Rênal boldly entered Julien's room; when he first saw her, he trembled.

"You're afraid!" she said to him. "But look at me: I'm braving all the dangers in the world without so much as lifting an eyebrow. I'm only afraid of one thing, and that's the moment I'll be here alone when you've gone." With that, she rushed out.

Ah! he exclaimed to himself. The only thing that sublime soul fears is remorse!

At last, night came. Monsieur de Rênal went off to the Casino club. Having announced that she had a migraine, his wife retired to her room, where she hurriedly got rid of Élisabeth in order to let Julien in.

Now he really was dying of hunger. Madame de Rênal went off to the pantry in search of bread. Julien heard a loud shout. When she returned, she told him that upon entering the dark pantry, she was approaching the counter where they sliced the bread when, reaching out her hand, she touched a woman's arm. It was Élisabeth, and she was the one who let out the shout Julien had heard.

"What was she doing there?"

"She was stealing a few sweets—either that or spying on us," said Madame de Rênal with utter indifference. "But fortunately I found some pâté and a big loaf of bread."

"What have you got there?" Julien asked, pointing to the stuffed pockets on the front of her apron.

Madame de Rênal had forgotten that she had stuffed them with bread after the dinner.

Julien took her in his arms in a gust of passion; never had she seemed so beautiful to him. Even in Paris, he thought confusedly, I'll never find anyone with so noble a character. She had all the gaucheries of a woman unused to doing such services, but at the same time all the courage of a woman who fears only very different, and much worse, dangers.

While Julien ate with a good appetite, and while his mistress was making little jokes about the humbleness of the meal—for she had a horror of speaking seriously—the door to her room was abruptly being rattled violently. It was Monsieur de Rênal.

“Why have you locked yourself in?” he cried. Julien just had time to slip under the sofa.

“What! You’re still dressed,” said Monsieur de Rênal as he entered. “You’re eating, and you’ve locked your door!”

Any other day such questioning, delivered with that kind of conjugal harshness, would have bothered Madame de Rênal, but tonight she could tell that her husband only had to lower his gaze a little to catch sight of Julien, for Monsieur de Rênal had flung himself down into the easy chair that Julien had been occupying, directly facing the sofa.

The migraine served as an excuse for everything. While her husband was giving a lengthy account of the billiard game at the Casino, which he had won—“the pool was nineteen francs, honest to God!”—she noticed Julien’s hat on a chair just a few feet away. Her coolheadedness again took control; she began to undress and, at the right moment, passed swiftly behind her husband, throwing her dress on top of the chair and the hat.

Finally, Monsieur de Rênal left. She asked Julien to tell her again about his life in the seminary. “Last night I couldn’t listen. All the time you were talking, I was only thinking of how I could get you to leave.”

She was the embodiment of imprudence. They spoke in their normal voices, and it was probably around two in the morning when they were interrupted by a furious knock at the door. It was Monsieur de Rênal again.

“Open up at once! There are thieves in the house,” he said. “Saint-Jean found their ladder this morning.”

“This is the end of everything!” cried Madame de Rênal, flinging herself into Julien’s arms. “He’s going to kill both of us. He doesn’t believe any of that about thieves. I want to die in your arms—I’ll be happier in my death than I ever would be in life.” She made no response to her husband, who was growing angrier all the time, instead embracing Julien passionately.

“Save the mother of Stanislas,” he said to her; he intoned it like a commandment. “I’m going to jump into the courtyard, out of the closet window. The dogs will recognize me. Put my clothes into a bundle and throw it down into the garden as soon as you can. Slow him down. Make him have to break the door down. And above all, don’t admit to anything—I forbid you to. It’s much better for him to be suspicious than to be certain.”

“You’ll kill yourself jumping down there!” was all she said, and it was her only concern.

She went with him to the closet window; then she took a moment to hide his clothes. Finally, she opened the door to her husband, who was seething with rage. He looked around in the room, then in the closet, without saying a word, and then disappeared. She tossed Julien’s clothes down to him; he caught them and ran off rapidly through the garden in the direction of the Doubs. While he was running, he heard a bullet whistling past him, and the sound of a gun going off.

It’s not Monsieur de Rênal, he thought. He’s not that good a shot. The dogs were racing silently alongside him; a second bullet apparently shattered the leg of one of them, for it began to howl pitifully. Julien leaped the wall of a terrace, sprinted off under cover for some fifty paces, and then began running in the other direction. He heard voices calling to him, and he could distinctly see the valet, his enemy, taking aim at him; a farmer had joined him, and shot at Julien now from the other side of the garden, but Julien had already reached the bank of the river, where he put on his clothes.

One hour later, he was a league away from Verrières, on the Geneva road. If they suspect it was me, they’ll look for me on the Paris road, Julien thought.

# BOOK TWO

She's not pretty; she doesn't have any rouge on.

SAINTE-BEUVE

## 1

# THE PLEASURES OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

*O rus quando ego te adspiciam!*

VIRGIL<sup>1</sup>

“Monsieur must be waiting for the mail coach to Paris?” said the keeper of the inn where he had stopped for dinner.

“Either today’s or tomorrow’s. It doesn’t matter,” said Julien.

While he was feigning indifference, the mail coach pulled up. There were two seats available.

“What? Is that you, Falcoz, my old friend?” exclaimed the traveler who had come from the Geneva side to the man who now was entering the coach along with Julien.

“I thought you had settled down somewhere around Lyon,” said Falcoz, “in some pretty valley by the Rhône.”

“Settled, you say! Oh no: I’m running away.”

“What? Running away? You, Saint-Giraud—with that honest face of yours, have you gone and committed a crime?”

“It amounts to the same thing, in a way. I’m running away from the abominable life a person lives out here in the provinces. As you know, I love the coolness of the forest and the serenity of the countryside, and you’ve even accused me of being a romantic. But the one thing I didn’t want to hear ever again was political talk, and politics pursues me night and day.”

“Which party do you support?”

“Neither, and that’s what dooms me. Look, here’s the entirety of my politics: I love music and painting. A good book, for me, is a real event. I’m about to turn forty-four. How many more years will I have? Fifteen, twenty, thirty at the most? Well, I’m pretty sure that in thirty years, the ministers of state will be a little more skillful, but otherwise just about as honest as the ones we have today. The history of England, I think, provides a kind of mirror of our future. There’ll always be a king who wants to expand his powers, and the ambition of becoming a député, the fame that comes with it, and the hundred thousand francs earned by Mirabeau<sup>2</sup>—all this will keep the wealthier provincials up at night. They’ll call that being Liberal and loving the people. The Ultras, on the other hand, will always be driven by the hope of being made a peer or a Gentleman of the Chamber. Aboard the ship of state, everybody wants to be the captain, because the job is so well paid. But isn’t there just a tiny space somewhere for a simple passenger?”

“Of course, of course, and a very pleasant one too, for an easygoing gentleman such as yourself. Was it these most recent elections that drove you out of your province?”<sup>3</sup>

“My troubles go further back. Four years ago, I was forty, and I had five hundred thousand francs. Today I’m four years older, and I have, probably, fifty thousand francs less, because I’m going to lose them on the sale of my château at Monfleury, near the Rhône, a superb location.

“In Paris, I was sick of that perpetual playacting you’re forced into doing by what they call the civilization of the nineteenth century. So I bought an estate in the mountains near the Rhône, one of the most beautiful areas under heaven.

“The village vicar and all the local gentry paid court to me for six months. I gave dinners. ‘I left Paris,’ I told them, ‘so as never to have to hear about politics anymore.’ Now, you see, I don’t subscribe to any newspaper. And the fewer letters the postman brings me, the better.

“But this did not suit the vicar, and before long I was bombarded with a thousand indiscreet requests, various intrigues, and so on. I wanted to give two or three hundred francs a year to the poor, but instead the various pious associa-

tions came calling—St. Joseph, the Blessed Virgin, et cetera—and I refused. That set me up for a stream of insults. I was foolish enough to be offended. I can't go out in the morning anymore and just enjoy the beauty of the mountains without coming across some annoyance that yanks me out of my reveries and unpleasantly reminds me of human beings and their wickedness. During the Rogation Day processions, for example, which include chants I enjoy (they're probably based on a Greek melody), they never come by and bless my lands because, the vicar tells them, they belong to an unbeliever. The cow of some devout old peasant woman dies, and she says it's because of a nearby pond that's owned by an unbeliever, me, so the next week I find all my fish floating belly up, poisoned with lime. Schemes and stratagems surround me. The local magistrate, an honest man but one who has to fear for his position, always finds against me. The peace of the countryside has become a hell to me. When they saw me abandoned by the vicar, who heads up the village chapter of the Congrégation, and saw that I didn't have the support of the retired captain who heads up the Liberals, they all fell upon me at once, all of them, right down to the mason I'd been employing for the past year, and the wheelwright, who tried to cheat me over some repairs to my plows.

"So in order to find some solid ground, and maybe win a few of my cases, I turned Liberal; but then, as you see, the recent elections came along, and they were after my vote . . ."

"For some candidate you didn't even know?"

"Not at all—for a man I knew only too well. I refused—the worst sort of imprudence! Then I had the Liberals after me, and my position became untenable. I think if the vicar were to come up with the idea of accusing me of murdering my servant, there'd be twenty witnesses popping up from both parties, all ready to swear they saw me do it."

"You thought you could live in the country without ministering to the passions of your neighbors, without even listening to their gossip. Quite a mistake!"

"Well, it's being rectified. Monfleury is for sale, and I'll lose the fifty thousand francs if I must, but I couldn't be happier at leaving that hell of hypocrisies and petty intrigues. I'm heading off now in search of pastoral solitude and peace

in the only place in France where they exist—that is, in a fourth-floor apartment overlooking the Champs-Élysées. And I’m currently deliberating whether I should begin my political career there, in the Roule quarter, by bringing the consecrated bread to the parish.”<sup>4</sup>

“None of this would have happened under Bonaparte,” said Falcoz, his eyes ablaze with anger and regret.

“It’s fine to say that, but why couldn’t he manage to stay on his throne, your Bonaparte? Everything I suffer from today comes from him.”

At this point, Julien began to pay closer attention. He had understood at once that the Bonapartist Falcoz was the old childhood friend of Monsieur de Rênal, repudiated by the latter in 1816, and the philosopher Saint-Giraud must be the brother of the head clerk of the prefecture of \*\*\*, who had an inside track on getting his hands on municipal property at rock-bottom rates.<sup>5</sup>

“All of it’s been the doing of your Bonaparte,” Saint-Giraud went on. “A respectable man, utterly inoffensive, forty years old and in possession of five hundred thousand francs, can’t settle down in the provinces and enjoy peace and quiet. The priests and the nobles of Bonaparte drive him away.”

“Oh, don’t speak ill of him,” cried Falcoz. “Never has France ranked so high or been so respected internationally as during his thirteen years’ reign. That was an era of greatness, greatness in everything that was done.”

“Your emperor—may the devil take him,” retorted the forty-four-year-old man, “was only great on the battlefields, and when he restored the nation’s finances in 1802. How should we read his conduct after that? With all his chamberlains, his pomp, his grand receptions at the Tuileries, he was just a new, revised edition, bringing back all the imbecilities of the monarchy. True, this was a somewhat corrected edition, and it might have stood for a century or two. The nobles and the priests preferred going straight back to the old edition, but they lack that iron hand that’s necessary to put it over to the public.”

“Well, that’s definitely the language of a former printer!”

“Who was it who drove me off my estate?” continued the angry printer. “The priests, whom Napoleon invited back with his Concordat,<sup>6</sup> instead of treating them the same way the state treats doctors, lawyers, astronomers—in



other words, treating them like any other citizens, with no interference in the ways they made their living. And do you think we would see this same crowd of insolent gentlemen everywhere if your Bonaparte had not created so many barons and counts? Certainly not. Their day had passed. And next to the churchmen, it was the petty nobles of the countryside who forced me to become a Liberal.”

The conversation could have gone on forever; the subject will occupy all France for the next half century. When Saint-Giraud kept on saying how impossible it was to live in the provinces, Julien timidly brought up the example of Monsieur de Rênal.

“Good heavens, young man, what an example!” cried Falcoz. “He’s made himself a hammer to avoid being the anvil, and a terrible hammer at that. But he’ll be overthrown by Valenod. Do you know that particular specimen? He’s the real thing. What will your Monsieur de Rênal do when he finds himself tossed out of office one of these mornings, and he sees Valenod taking his place?”

“He’ll be left standing face to face with his crimes,” said Saint-Giraud. “So you know Verrières, young man? Well! Bonaparte, may he rot in hell along with all his monarchical tinsel, is the one who made possible the reign of the Rênals and the Chélans, and they in turn have brought in the Valenods and the Maslons.”

All this somber political conversation surprised Julien and distracted him from his erotic reveries.

His first view of Paris, seen from a distance, did not make much of an impression on him. The castles in the air that he was busily creating as he imagined his future had to duel with the still-vivid memories of the twenty-four hours he had just passed in Verrières. He swore to himself that he would never abandon the children of his mistress, that he would give up everything to protect them if the machinations of the priests were to give us a republic and a new persecution of the nobles.

What would have become of him if, on the night he arrived in Verrières, when he leaned his ladder up against the window of Madame de Rênal’s bed-

room, he had found the room occupied by some stranger, or by Monsieur de Rênal?

But also, what bliss in those first two hours, when his lover sincerely wanted to send him on his way, and he pleaded his cause sitting next to her in the darkness! A person with a mind like Julien's will be haunted by such memories for the rest of his life. The rest of their meeting was already now blending into the memory of the first days of their love affair, fourteen months previous.

The sudden stop of the coach jolted Julien out of his profound reverie. They had just entered the courtyard of the posthouse on the rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau. He told the driver of a passing cab, "I want to go to Malmaison."<sup>7</sup>

"At this hour, Monsieur? What for?"

"That's not your business. Let's go."

Every real passion is only concerned with itself. This is why, as I see it, passions are so ridiculous in Paris, where your neighbor always insists on your paying attention to him. I won't describe the raptures Julien felt upon visiting Malmaison. He wept. Really? In spite of the ugly little white walls they put up this year that cut the park up into little sections?<sup>8</sup>

Oh yes, it's true, Monsieur. For Julien, as for posterity, there was no important difference among Arcole, Saint Helena, and Malmaison.<sup>9</sup>

Later that night, Julien hesitated at length before going into a theater; he retained some strange prejudices about such places of perdition.

Julien's deep-seated habit of mistrust kept him from being able to admire the real, living Paris; he was moved only by the monuments that recalled his heroes.

"Well, here I am—in the great center of intrigue and hypocrisy! This is the place where the people who protect the abbé de Frilair are in charge."

On the evening of the third day, his curiosity won out over his plan to see everything first, and he went to meet Father Pirard. The priest explained to him, in a chilly tone, what sort of life awaited him at the home of Monsieur de La Mole.

"If after a few months you turn out not to be useful to him, you'll go back to the seminary, but by the front door. You're going to live in the home of the mar-

quis, one of France's greatest nobles. You'll dress in black, but like a man in mourning, not like a clergyman. I insist that you continue your theological studies three times a week at a seminary. I'll introduce you there. Every day at noon you will present yourself in the marquis's library, where you will write letters regarding his lawsuits and other business. The marquis makes brief notes on every letter he receives to indicate the sort of response it requires. I've claimed that after three months, you will have progressed sufficiently in drafting those responses that out of every twelve submitted for the marquis's signature, he will be able to sign eight or nine. At eight in the evening, you will put his study in order, and at ten you'll be free.

"It could happen," Father Pirard continued, "that some old lady or some gentlemen with an attractive manner could suggest that you would reap immense benefits, or could more crassly and openly offer you gold, in return for you letting them see the letters the marquis receives . . ."

"Oh, Monsieur!" exclaimed Julien, reddening.

"It strikes me as odd," said the priest with a thin smile, "that, poor as you are, and even after a year in the seminary, you should still express such virtuous indignation. You must have been genuinely blind!

"Or could it be his blood speaking through him?" said the abbé quietly, almost as if to himself. "The really strange thing is," he added, looking directly at Julien, "that the marquis knows you . . . I don't know how. To start, he's giving you a salary of one hundred louis.<sup>10</sup> The marquis is a man who acts entirely on whims. It's his one great weakness—he'll outdo you in any childishness. If he's happy with you, your salary could rise as high as eight thousand francs.

"But you must never forget," the priest said in a harsh tone of voice, "that he's not giving you all that money because you have pretty eyes. You need to be useful. If I were in your place, I'd keep as quiet as I could, and above all I wouldn't prattle on about things I didn't understand.

"Oh, yes," the abbé said. "I do have some information for you. I'd forgotten about the family of the Marquis de La Mole. He has two children, a daughter and a nineteen-year-old son, the very picture of elegance, a bit wild, who never knows at noon what he'll be doing at two. He has spirit and courage. He's been

to war in Spain.<sup>11</sup> The marquis hopes, though I don't know why, that you'll become friends with the young Comte Norbert. I told him you're a great Latinist, so perhaps he hopes you'll teach his son a few useful little phrases out of Cicero or Virgil.

"If I were you, I'd never allow myself to be mocked or joked about by that young man. And, in fact, before I'd respond to his overtures, which might be perfectly polite but tinged with irony, I'd make him repeat them, at least twice.

"I won't conceal from you that the young Comte de La Mole will no doubt despise you at first for the simple reason that you're a bourgeois. His ancestor was a courtier who had the honor of having his head cut off on the place de la Grève, on April 26, 1574, the result of a political plot. You, on the other hand, are the son of a carpenter from Verrières, and moreover, you're employed by his father. Pay attention to these distinctions and study the family's history in Moreri.<sup>12</sup> All the sycophants who dine with them will, from time to time, make what they consider delicate allusions to it.

"Be very careful how you respond to the pleasantries of the Comte Norbert de La Mole, commander of a squadron in the Hussars and future peer of France, and don't come complaining to me later about them."

"It would seem to me," said Julien, blushing, "that I shouldn't make any answer at all to a man who treats me with contempt."

"You have no idea of the kind of contempt I mean. He'll only show it through exaggerated compliments. If you're a fool, you'll be taken in by them; if you want to get ahead in life, you should let yourself be taken in by them."

"When I decide I've had enough," said Julien, "would I seem like an ingrate if I were to go back to my little cell, room number 103?"

"No doubt," said the abbé, "all the parasites of the house will libel you, but at that point I'll step in. *Adsum qui fece*.<sup>13</sup> I'll say I'm the one who made the decision for you."

Julien was hurt by the bitter, almost hostile tone Father Pirard was taking with him; the tone unnerved him and spoiled his reply.

The fact was that the abbé had an uneasy conscience about his affection

for Julien, and now he felt a kind of religious fear about intervening so directly in the destiny of another man.

He continued with the same ill grace, sounding as though it was a painful duty to have to talk to him: "You will also be seeing Madame, the Marquise de La Mole. She is a tall, blond woman, devout, haughty, impeccably polite, and perfectly insignificant. She is the daughter of the old Duc de Chaulnes, a man renowned for his aristocratic prejudices. This great lady is a kind of compendium, in high relief, of everything that makes up the character of a lady of her exalted rank. She doesn't bother to conceal her view that having ancestors who went on the Crusades is the only distinction that matters. Money is way down on the list of things to be valued. Does that surprise you? Well, we aren't in the provinces anymore, my friend.

"In her drawing room, you will hear many great lords speaking of our princes with the most extraordinary lack of respect. But Madame de La Mole will lower her voice out of respect whenever she mentions the name of a prince, or especially that of a princess. I would urge you never to opine in her presence that Philip II or Henry VIII were monsters. They were *KINGS*, which gives them the inalienable right to the respect of all, and especially to that of anyone of lower birth, like you and me. However," added Father Pirard, "you and I are priests—she will take you for one—and as such, she will view us as a species of valet necessary for her salvation."

"Monsieur," said Julien, "I'm beginning to think I won't last long in Paris."

"As you wish. But do note first that there is no fortune to be made by a man of our cloth except through these great lords. As for you, with that indefinable something in your character—I can't quite define it, anyway—you'll either go on to make your fortune, or you'll be the target of persecution. With you, there's no middle way. Be careful. Men will see that, when they converse with you, it gives you no pleasure. In this country, where social relations are everything, you'll get nothing but misfortune if you don't win the respect of people.

"What would have become of you in Besançon, if it hadn't been for this whim on the part of the Marquis de La Mole? Someday you'll see how truly

singular it is that he's done this for you, and if you're not a monster, you'll feel an eternal gratitude to him and his family. How many poor priests, and better scholars than you, have spent years in Paris living on the fifteen sous they get for saying Mass, and the ten sous they earn from disputations at the Sorbonne? . . . Remember the story I told you last winter, about the first years of that miserable Cardinal Dubois.<sup>14</sup> Are you so proud as to think you have more talent than he did?

"Take me, for example—a quiet type, a man of middling talent, I thought I'd be able to live out my days as director of the seminary. I was childish enough to get attached to the place. Well! As it happened, I was on the verge of being dismissed when I handed in my resignation. Shall I tell you the extent of my fortune? I had five hundred and twenty francs capital, no more and no less. Not a single friend, and barely two or three acquaintances. Monsieur de La Mole, a man I had never laid eyes on, rescued me from that dilemma. He only had to say a word, and I was offered a living where all my parishioners are well off, not sunk in any of the common vices, with an income that makes me blush, it's so disproportionate to the work I have to do. I've been telling you all this at such length just to pound a little sense into that head of yours.

"One more thing. My misfortune is my tendency to irritability. It's possible that you and I will fall out and not be on speaking terms.

"If the haughtiness of the marquise or the annoying pleasantries of her son make this house truly uncomfortable for you, I would advise you to finish your studies in some seminary thirty leagues from Paris, preferably to the north rather than to the south. The north offers more civilization and fewer injustices. And," he added, dropping his voice, "I must tell you, the proximity of the Paris newspapers keeps the petty tyrants afraid of going too far.

"If we do continue enjoying each other's company, and if the marquis's home is no longer comfortable for you, I'll offer you the position of being my vicar, and I'll give you half the money the living brings in. I owe you that, and much more," he said, interrupting the thanks Julien was beginning to utter, "for that extraordinary offer you made me at Besançon. If instead of my five hundred and fifty francs I'd had none, you would have saved me."

By now, the abbé had softened his cruel tone. To his great embarrassment, Julien felt tears in his eyes; he was dying to throw himself into his friend's arms. He could not keep himself from saying, in the manliest tone he was capable of affecting:

"I've been hated by my father since my birth. It was one of my greatest misfortunes. But I won't complain about my fate ever again: I've found a father in you, Monsieur."

"Ah, good, good," said the abbé, self-consciously; then, recalling, at this opportune moment, a phrase suited to the director of a seminary: "You should never say 'fate,' my boy. Always say Providence."

The cab came to a stop; the coachman lifted the bronze knocker on an immense door: this was the *HÔTEL DE LA MOLE*; and, just in case passersby weren't sure, those words were inscribed on marble above the door.

That affectation displeased Julien. They're so petrified of the Jacobins! They see a Robespierre and his cart behind every hedge, and it can almost make you die laughing at them—and then they go and attach a sign like this to their houses, so in case of an insurrection, the mob will know which house is theirs, and proceed to pillage it. He told Father Pirard what he was thinking.

"Ah, poor boy! You'll be my vicar soon enough. What a horrible thought you've just had!"

"Pretty obvious, if you ask me," said Julien.

The solemnity of the porter, and even more the splendor of the courtyard, filled him with admiration. The sun shone brightly.

"What magnificent architecture!" he exclaimed to his friend.

This was one of those houses with the flat fronts that one sees in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, erected around the time of Voltaire's death. Never had fashion and beauty so completely parted company.

## ENTRY INTO SOCIETY

*A ridiculous yet touching memory: the first salon where I made my first appearance, at eighteen, all alone and without other support! The harder I tried to please, the more awkward I became. I inferred the wrong ideas about everything; either I opened myself up far too quickly, or I suspected some man of being my enemy because he'd looked at me. But still, even with all my awful missteps, what a fine day that fine day was!*

KANT<sup>15</sup>

Julien stopped and stood still, dumbstruck, in the middle of the courtyard.

“Don’t gawk like a fool,” said the abbé Pirard. “You have those brutal thoughts, and then you go and act like a child! Where’s the good old *nil admirari* of Horace?<sup>16</sup> [Never show enthusiasm.] Remember that this crowd of lackeys, when they see you established in this place, will set about making fun of you. They’ll see you as an equal who’s been unjustly put above them. They’ll give you their friendly advice and counsel, just out of a desire to help you along, but they’ll really be trying to get you to make some false step, some major slip.”

“Let them try,” said Julien, biting his lip and resuming his habit of mistrust.

The rooms the two gentlemen traversed on the first floor on their way to the marquis’s study would seem to you, O my reader, as depressing as they were magnificent. If someone were to offer them to you just as they are, you’d refuse to live in them; they are the very landscape of the yawn and the miserable conversation. But they enchanted Julien doubly. “How could anyone be unhappy,” he thought, “while living in such a splendid place!”

At last our gentlemen arrived at the ugliest of all the rooms in the superb suite; there was almost no daylight; in it was seated a thin man with a lively expression and a blond wig. The abbé turned to Julien and introduced him. It was the marquis. Julien could barely recognize him, so polite he was. This was no



longer the great lord with that haughty expression he remembered from the abbey of Bray-le-Haut. Julien thought his wig was overstuffed with hair. Such thoughts kept him from being intimidated at all. This descendant of a friend of Henri III struck him as unimpressive. He was quite thin, and he fidgeted constantly. But soon he came to think the marquis's polite style was even more appealing to the person he was addressing than that of the bishop of Besançon himself. Their meeting was over in less than three minutes. As they left, the abbé said to Julien:

"You were staring at the marquis as if he were a painting. I'm not educated enough in what these people would call polite behavior, but your bold stare seemed to me a shade below the standard."

They had got back up into their cab again; the driver stopped by the boulevard: the abbé led Julien through a suite of large rooms. Julien noticed that they were unfurnished. He had stopped to look at a magnificent gilt clock, which represented a scene that struck him as quite indecent, when a very elegant gentleman approached him with a smile. Julien responded with a slight bow.

The gentleman continued smiling, and now reached forward and put his hand on Julien's shoulder. Julien leaped back, his face reddening with anger. Father Pirard, despite his gravity, laughed till tears came to his eyes. The gentleman was a tailor.

"I'm going to leave you to yourself for two days," the abbé said as he was going. "You won't be ready to meet Madame de La Mole until then. Somebody else would probably watch over you like a vulnerable daughter in these first moments of your stay in our modern Babylon. Go out and ruin yourself right away if that's what you want to do, and I'll be freed from the weakness that makes me care about you. The day after tomorrow, the tailor will bring you two suits. You'll tip five francs to the boy who does the fitting. Beyond that, don't let these Parisians so much as hear the sound of your voice. If you say anything at all, they'll find a way of ridiculing you for it. That's what their talent is. Come to my place at noon on the day after tomorrow . . . All right, get along, ruin yourself . . . Wait, I forgot: order some boots, some shirts, and a hat, from these addresses."

Julien looked at the handwriting.

"It's the marquis's hand," said the abbé. "He's an active man, one who always thinks ahead, one who would rather do things than command others to do them. He's taking you on so that you can spare him the trouble of things like this. Will you be sharp enough to carry out all the things that clever man only hints at? Time will tell. Watch out for yourself!"

Without saying a word, Julien went off to the shops indicated; he noticed that he was treated with respect: the bootmaker wrote his name down in his register as Monsieur Julien de Sorel.

At the Père-Lachaise cemetery, a helpful and clearly very Liberal gentleman offered to show Julien the tomb of Marshal Ney, which lacks any sort of epitaph due to a clever bit of political maneuvering.<sup>17</sup> After parting from this Liberal who, tears in his eyes, practically embraced him, Julien found that his watch was gone. Wiser for the experience, he presented himself the following day to Father Pirard, who looked him over closely.

"You look as if you're going to become a fop," the abbé said sternly. Julien looked like a very young man in full mourning; the look became him, but the good priest was too much of a provincial himself to see that Julien still had that swing of the shoulders that, in the provinces, denotes elegance and social importance. When he got a look at Julien, the marquis took such a different view of his graces than the priest did that he asked the latter:

"Would you have any objection to Monsieur Sorel taking some dancing lessons?" The abbé stood still, petrified.

"No," he replied at last. "Julien is not a priest."

Mounting a small hidden staircase two steps at a time, the marquis escorted our hero to a pretty little attic room that looked out upon the immense garden. He asked him how many shirts he had purchased.

"Two," replied Julien, taken aback that so great a lord should descend to such details.

"Very well," replied the marquis with a serious air, and then, in a commanding and curt tone, which startled Julien, he continued: "Very well! Now order twenty-two more. Here is your first quarter's salary."

Coming back down from the attic, the marquis called to an elderly man, “Arsène, you’ll be taking care of Monsieur Sorel’s needs.” A few minutes later, Julien found himself alone in a magnificent library; it was a delicious moment. So as to conceal his emotion, he went over and hid himself in a little dark corner, from which he could contemplate, enraptured, the glittering spines of the books: I could read all this, he said to himself. How could I possibly be unhappy here? Monsieur de Rênal would consider himself permanently disgraced if he had done one hundredth of what the Marquis de La Mole has just done for me.

But let’s take a look at the copies we’re supposed to make. When his work was done, Julien took a breath and approached the shelves; finding there an edition of Voltaire, he almost went mad with joy. He hurried over and opened the library’s door so that he wouldn’t be surprised by someone’s entry. He gave himself the pleasure of opening up each one of the eighty volumes. They had been magnificently bound, the work of one of London’s finest artisans. Nothing more was needed to bring Julien’s admiration to its maximum pitch.

An hour later, the marquis came in, looked the copies over, and was astonished to see that Julien spelled *cela* with two *l*s, *cella*.<sup>18</sup> Everything the abbé has been telling me about his learning—is it just a tale? The marquis was deeply discouraged, but he said to him gently:

“You’re not too sure when it comes to spelling?”

“That’s true,” said Julien, without thinking at all how damning it was to admit this; he had been encouraged by all the kindnesses of the marquis, which contrasted so sharply with the arrogance of Monsieur de Rênal.

It’s just so much wasted time, then, this experiment with the little abbé from the Franche-Comté, thought the marquis; but I really need a man I can rely on!

“*Cela* is spelled with only one *l*,” said the marquis. “When you’ve finished all your copies, go to the dictionary to look up the words you aren’t sure about.”

At six o’clock the marquis sent for him; he looked at Julien’s boots with evident pain: “I’ve made an error—I failed to tell you that you must dress every day at five-thirty.”

Julien looked at him, not understanding. "I mean put on stockings. Arsène will remind you. As for today, I'll make your excuses."

As he finished speaking, Monsieur de La Mole walked past Julien into a drawing room resplendent with gilding. In situations like this, Monsieur de Rênal never failed to increase his pace so as to go into the room first. That little vanity of his previous employer led Julien to tread on the heel of the marquis, which caused him a great deal of pain due to his gout. Oh, and he's clumsy as well! the latter said to himself. He introduced him to a tall, imposing woman. It was the marquise. Julien found her insolent, a little like Madame de Maugiron, the wife of the subprefect of Verrières, at the Saint Charles's Day dinner.<sup>19</sup> A little overcome by the magnificence of the room, Julien did not hear what Monsieur de La Mole was saying. The marquise barely seemed to notice him. A number of men were there, among whom Julien was enormously pleased to recognize the young bishop of Agde, who had deigned to speak with him some months back at the ceremony at Bray-le-Haut. The young ecclesiastic was alarmed, no doubt, at the warm, friendly gaze that Julien in his timidity fixed upon him, and he appeared not to recognize the young provincial.

The men gathered in the drawing room seemed to Julien to have something a little sad and constrained about them; in Paris, one speaks quietly, and one does not exaggerate trifling things.

A good-looking young man with a mustache, very pale and very slender, came in about six thirty; his head seemed quite small.

As he kissed her hand, the marquise said, "You always make us wait for you."

Julien understood that this was the Comte de La Mole. He found him immediately charming.

Is it possible, he thought, that this is the man whose snide pleasantries will drive me out of this house?

After examining Comte Norbert, Julien noted that he wore boots and spurs. But I ought to be wearing shoes, evidently because I'm an inferior. They all sat down to the table. Julien overheard the marquise say something that sounded like a reproof, and she raised her voice just a little. At the same time, he saw a young woman, very blond and very attractive, come and sit down across from

her. She didn't appeal to him at all, but the longer he looked at her, the more he thought he had never seen such beautiful eyes; but they seemed to hint at an extremely cold heart. Then Julien thought they had a bored look about them, but the kind of boredom that stays on alert, always reminding her of her duty to be imposing. Madame de Rênal had very beautiful eyes, he said to himself, and everyone complimented her on them, but they had nothing in common with these eyes. Julien was not experienced enough yet to recognize that it was a fiery wit that shone from time to time in the eyes of Mademoiselle Mathilde, which he heard others call her. When the eyes of Madame de Rênal flashed like that, it was the fire of passion, or sometimes that of a generous indignation at hearing of some mean-spirited action. Toward the end of the dinner, Julien finally found a word to describe the kind of beauty he saw in the eyes of Mademoiselle de La Mole: Scintillating, he said to himself. Apart from that, she rather cruelly resembled her mother, who displeased him more and more, and he ceased looking at her. On the other hand, Comte Norbert seemed to him to be admirable in every respect. Julien was so seduced by him that he never dreamed of feeling jealousy of him or hatred for him, because he was richer and more noble.

Julien thought the marquis looked bored.

During the second course, he said to his son, "Norbert, I'd like you to be kind to Monsieur Julien Sorel, the man I've just taken on to my general staff, and who I hope to make a gentleman, if *that (cela)* can be done."

"He's my secretary," the marquis said to his neighbor, "and he spells *cela* with a double *l*."

Everyone turned and looked at Julien, who bowed a little too deeply to Norbert; but in general they were content with the look of him.

The marquis must have been saying something about the education Julien had received, for now one of the guests attacked him on the subject of Horace. It was precisely Horace that allowed me to succeed so well with the bishop of Besançon, Julien said to himself. Evidently he's the only author they know. From that moment on, he was complete master of himself. He relaxed now, because he had decided that Mademoiselle de La Mole would never be a

woman in his eyes. Since going to the seminary, he defied men to do their worst, and rarely let himself be intimidated by them. He would have been completely cool and in control if only the dining room had been a little less magnificently furnished. In fact, it was two great mirrors, each eight feet tall, in which he could sometimes see his adversary talking about Horace, that kept him in awe. His sentences were not too long for a provincial. He had handsome eyes, which were all the more striking when he felt either timid or shyly pleased with the answer he had made. People found him agreeable. An examination like this lent some interest to a solemn dinner party. The marquis signaled to Julien's interlocutor to go ahead and push him hard. Could it be that he knows something? he thought.

Julien responded, working out new ideas as he spoke, and lost his shyness so much as to show, not exactly wit, which would be impossible for someone not conversant in the language of Paris, but a certain originality of thinking, even if his expression was unpolished and not always apt, and they all saw that his grasp of Latin was perfect.

Julien's interlocutor was a member of the Académie des inscriptions who by some chance knew Latin.<sup>20</sup> He found in Julien a very sound humanist, so he abandoned all fear of making the young man blush and instead really tried to embarrass him. In the heat of the combat, Julien eventually forgot all about the magnificence of the dining room and proceeded to express some ideas regarding the Latin poets that his interlocutor had not read elsewhere. As an honest man, he attributed them to the young secretary. Fortunately, the discussion turned to the old question of whether Horace had been rich or poor: an amiable sort, pleasure-seeking and easygoing, who wrote verses to amuse himself, like Chapelle,<sup>21</sup> the friend of Molière and La Fontaine, or a wretched poet laureate, following the court and writing odes for the birthday of the king, like Southey, the accuser of Lord Byron.<sup>22</sup> They compared the state of society under Augustus and George IV. The aristocracy was all-powerful in both, but in Rome, it had its powers usurped by Maecenas, who was a mere knight; and in England, the aristocracy had reduced George IV to something like the Doge of Venice. This discussion seemed to rouse the marquis out of the state of torpor into which his boredom had plunged him since the beginning of the dinner.

Julien understood nothing of all those modern names like Southey, Lord Byron, George IV, names he was hearing for the first time. But no one failed to notice that whenever the topic turned to facts concerning ancient Rome—knowledge of which could be had by reading the works of Horace, Martial, Tacitus, etc.—Julien displayed an uncontested superiority. He cavalierly appropriated a number of ideas he had learned from the bishop of Besançon during the famous discussion he had had with that prelate; they all went over quite well.

When they grew tired of discussing poets, the marquise, who strictly adhered to finding amusing whatever amused her husband, deigned to glance at Julien. The academician, seated near her, said to her that the gauche manners of our young abbé might conceal a man of learning; Julien heard part of that. Prefabricated phrases like that suited the wit of the mistress of the house; she adopted the phrase in referring to Julien, and she felt pleased that she had invited the academician to dinner. He amuses Monsieur de La Mole, she said to herself.

### 3

## FIRST STEPS

*This immense valley, filled with brilliant lights, and with  
so many thousands of people dazzles me. Not a one of them  
knows me, and each one is my superior. My head is swimming.*

POEMI DELL'AV. REINA<sup>23</sup>

Very early the morning of the next day, as Julien sat copying letters in the library, Mademoiselle Mathilde entered by a little private door that was cleverly concealed behind book spines. While Julien found the camouflaged doorway fascinating, Mademoiselle Mathilde appeared quite surprised and rather annoyed to see him there. She was wearing curling papers, and Julien thought

she looked hard, arrogant, and almost masculine. Mademoiselle de La Mole had a secret habit of coming in and stealing her father's books without his knowing about it. Julien's presence meant that her scheme would be futile that morning, and she was therefore all the more annoyed because she had come in to get the second volume of Voltaire's *Princesse de Babylone*—a fitting complement to a richly monarchical and religious education, one of the masterpieces of Sacré-Coeur!<sup>24</sup> The poor girl, at nineteen years old, already required a little spice to make a novel interesting.

Around three o'clock, Comte Norbert appeared in the library. He had come in to study a newspaper so as to be able to talk politics that evening, and was quite pleased to discover Julien there—having completely forgotten about him. He behaved perfectly toward him, offering him the use of a horse.

"My father lets us have some free time before dinner."

Julien understood the use of the word *us* and found it charming.

"Good Lord, Monsieur le Comte," said Julien, "if it were a matter of felling an eighty-foot tree, squaring it and sawing it into planks, I could acquit myself well, but when it comes to riding a horse, well, that's something I haven't done more than six times in my life."

"Well then, this will be the seventh," said Norbert. Inwardly, Julien was remembering the entry of the king of \*\*\* into Verrières, and thinking he handled a horse very well. But today, coming back from the Bois du Boulogne, right in the middle of the rue du Bac, he took a fall when he had to swerve quickly to avoid a cab, and he ended up covered in mud. It was a lucky thing that he owned two suits. At dinner, the marquis, wishing to get Julien into the conversation, asked him how the outing had gone; Norbert hastened to give a generous description of events.

"Monsieur le Comte is too good to me," Julien replied. "I thank him, and I'm fully appreciative of his kindness. He gave me the gentlest horse, and the prettiest. But after all, he could hardly fasten me to the saddle, and without that precaution, I fell off, right in the middle of that long street just off the bridge." Mademoiselle Mathilde tried, in vain, to conceal her outburst of laughter; her indiscretion then prompted her to ask him for details. Julien carried it off by responding simply and directly; he was graceful without even knowing it.



“I have hopes for this little priest,” the marquis said to the academician, “a simple country boy in such a situation! And he willingly narrated his mishaps in front of the *ladies*!”

Julien put his listeners perfectly at ease regarding his misadventure, so much so that toward the end of the dinner, when the conversation had taken a different turn, Mademoiselle Mathilde began asking her brother more questions about the incident. Her questions continued, and when, several times, Julien made eye contact with her, he felt bold enough to respond himself, though he hadn’t been asked, and all three of them ended up laughing together just like three young villagers in the depths of a forest.

The next day, Julien attended two theology lectures, and then returned to transcribe some twenty letters. He found a young man seated close to his place; the young man was very carefully dressed, but his overall appearance was vulgar, and his face seemed to suggest envy.

The marquis came in. “What are you doing here, Monsieur Tanbeau?” he asked the newcomer in a harsh tone of voice.

“I thought . . .” the young man began, a fawning smile on his face.

“No, Monsieur, *you did not think*. This is an attempt, and it won’t do.”

Young Tanbeau got up, furious, and disappeared. He was a nephew of the academician, the friend of Madame de La Mole, and was hoping to become a man of letters. The academician had persuaded the marquis to take him on as a secretary. Tanbeau, who worked in a remote room, having heard of the favor being bestowed upon Julien, wanted to share in it, and so this morning he had taken his desk and set up in the library.

At four o’clock, Julien briefly hesitated, then made up his mind to go seek out Comte Norbert. He found him getting ready to go riding. Norbert, whose manners were perfect, was somewhat embarrassed.

“I think,” he said to Julien, “that you’ll be going to riding school soon, and after a few weeks I’ll be delighted to go riding with you.”

“I wanted to have the honor of thanking you for all the kindnesses you’ve shown me. Believe me, monsieur,” Julien added with great seriousness, “I’m very much aware of how much I owe you. If your horse isn’t injured after my clumsiness the other day, and if he’s available, I’d like to ride him today.”

“For heaven’s sake, my dear Sorel, do so at your own peril. But let’s assume that I’ve put to you all the objections that prudence requires. The fact is, it’s now four o’clock, and we haven’t much time left.”

When he was mounted on the horse: “What do you have to do to keep from falling?” Julien asked the young count.

“A lot of things!” cried Norbert, bursting into laughter. “To begin with, lean back in the saddle.”

Julien started off at a fast trot. They were crossing the place Louis XVI.

“Ah! Listen, young hothead: there are too many carriages here, and they’re being driven by people who won’t be careful. Once you’re down on the ground, they’ll roll right over you. They aren’t going to risk injuring their horses’ mouths by pulling up short.”

Twenty times Norbert saw Julien just about to fall, but at last their ride came to an end without incident. As they came back in, the young count said to his sister:

“Let me introduce a bold daredevil.”

At dinner, speaking to his father down at the other end of the table, he did justice to Julien’s courage; but that was all one could praise concerning his riding. The young count had overheard, that morning, the men who groomed the horses finding in Julien’s fall great opportunity to mock him outrageously.

But despite all this kindness, Julien soon found himself perfectly isolated in the midst of that family. All their ways seemed strange to him, and he was always making mistakes. His blunders provided great merriment for the valets.

The abbé Pirard had gone off to his parish. He thought, if Julien is a frail reed, let him perish. If he’s a man of character, he’ll pull through on his own.

# THE HÔTEL DE LA MOLE

*What's he doing here? Is he enjoying himself?  
Is he trying to be liked?*

RONSARD<sup>25</sup>

If everything seemed strange to Julien, in the noble drawing room of the Hôtel de La Mole, the pale, black-clad young man seemed equally strange to those who deigned to notice him. Madame de La Mole suggested to her husband that Julien be sent away on some sort of business on the days when certain people were coming to dine.

"I'd like to carry this experiment through to the end," the marquis replied. "Father Pirard argues that we do wrong to damage the self-esteem of people we bring in to live with us. *You can only lean on something that resists*, and so forth.<sup>26</sup> The only problem with this young man is his odd appearance, but otherwise, he might as well be a deaf-mute."

In order to keep things straight, Julien said to himself, I should write down the names and make a few notes about the characters of the people who come into this drawing room.

He put at the top of his page five or six frequent guests who were nice to him just in case, seeing that he appeared to be a protégé of the marquis because of some whim of the latter's. These were poor wretches, more or less cowardly; but it must be admitted, to the credit of the men of this type who are found today in all the drawing rooms of the nobility, that they were not always cowardly to everyone. Some of them would let themselves be insulted by the marquis, but would bristle at so much as a sharp word from Madame de La Mole.

There was too much pride and too much boredom in the characters of both

marquis and marquise; they were both far too accustomed to insulting people for their own distraction for them to hope to have any real friends. But except on the days it rained, and on days the boredom swelled into a ferocious state, which were rare, one always found them creatures of the most exquisite politeness.

If the five or six hangers-on who took so paternal an interest in Julien were to depart the Hôtel de La Mole, the Marquise would have been abandoned to long bouts of solitude; and in the eyes of women of her rank, solitude is frightful: it's the emblem of *disgrace*.

The Marquis behaved perfectly toward his wife. He saw to it that her salon was well stocked, though not with peers: he found his new colleagues insufficiently noble to be invited to his home as friends, and insufficiently amusing to be admitted as inferiors.<sup>27</sup>

Julien didn't fully understand all these secrets until much later. High-level politics, which is the main topic of discussion in bourgeois households, is never discussed in those of the marquis's class, except in times of great crisis.

Even in this jaded age of ours, so powerful remains the need to be amused that even on the days of dinner parties, as soon as the marquis left the room, everyone else fled. Provided you didn't make jokes about God, or priests, or the king, or the men in power, or the artists protected by the Court, or anything of long standing; provided you said nothing good about Béranger, or the opposition press, or Voltaire, or Rousseau, or of anything that might allow a little free speech; provided above all that you did not talk politics—you could talk freely about anything.<sup>28</sup>

There is no hundred-thousand-écu income, no blue ribbon that can stand up to a salon charter like this one. Even the littlest lively idea seemed an affront. Despite the correct tone, the perfect manners, the desire to be agreeable, boredom was evident on every face. The young men who came to pay their respects were terrified of saying something that might make someone suspect them of having a thought in their heads, or of having been reading some forbidden book. They made a few elegant remarks about Rossini, or the weather, and then fell silent.

Julien noticed that the conversation was usually kept going by two viscounts and five barons Monsieur de La Mole had known during the Emigration. These gentlemen enjoyed incomes of between six and eight thousand francs a year; four of them were *Quotidienne* men, and three were for the *Gazette de France*.<sup>29</sup> Every day, one of them told some anecdote from the palace that prominently featured the word *admirable*. Julien noticed that the gentleman had been decorated with five crosses, whereas most of the others had only three.

Still, ten footmen in livery were on display in the antechamber, and throughout the evening, ices or tea were served every quarter of an hour; at midnight, there was a kind of supper with champagne.

That was the reason Julien sometimes stayed on until the end; but otherwise, he could not comprehend how anyone could listen seriously to the banal conversation that went on in that magnificently gilded drawing room. At times he stared at the interlocutors to see if perhaps they were consciously satirizing themselves. My Monsieur de Maistre, whose work I know by heart, is a hundred times more interesting, he thought, and yet he's boring enough.

Julien was not the only one to notice the mental asphyxiation. Some found consolation in stuffing themselves with ices, others in being able to say later on, I just came from the Hôtel de La Mole, where I heard that Russia . . .

Julien learned from one of the sycophants that less than six months previous, Madame de La Mole had rewarded an assiduity of twenty years with getting a prefecture for poor Baron Le Bourguignon, who had been a subprefect since the Restoration.

That great event had reinvigorated the zeal of all those gentlemen; while the least slight might have offended them before, now nothing could make them take offence. Any such snub was rarely direct, but Julien had already heard at the dinner table two or three little exchanges between the marquis and the marquise that were cruel toward those seated near them. Those noble personages never concealed the contempt they felt for anyone not born of people who had been privileged to *ride in the king's carriages*. Julien observed that the word *Crusade* was the only one guaranteed to make their faces shift

into expressions of grave respect. Their ordinary expressions of respect always had a hint of condescension about them.

Amid all this magnificence and all this ennui, Julien was interested only in Monsieur de La Mole; he was pleased to hear him protest one day that he had had nothing to do with the promotion of that poor Le Bourguignon. This was a tactful way of giving the marquise her due: Julien had learned the truth of the story from Father Pirard.

One morning the priest was working alongside Julien in the marquis's library, concerning the eternal Frilair lawsuit:

"Monsieur," said Julien abruptly, "dining every day with Madame la Marquise—is this one of my duties, or is it a favor they're doing me?"

"It's an exceptional honor!" replied the priest, scandalized by the question. "Monsieur N\*\*\*, the academician, had been assiduously paying court, and he's never been able to obtain such an honor for his nephew Tanbeau."

"Well, if you ask me, Monsieur, it's the most painful part of the job. I was less bored in the seminary. I've seen Mademoiselle de La Mole yawning at times, though she must be accustomed to the flatteries of the family friends. I'm afraid I'm going to fall asleep. Could you please find some way to get me permission to go off to some obscure inn somewhere and get a forty-sou dinner by myself?"

The abbé, a true man of upward mobility himself, was only too aware of the honor of dining with a great lord. While he was struggling to make Julien understand this, a slight sound made him turn his head. Julien saw that it was Mademoiselle de La Mole, listening to them. He blushed. She had come to look for a book and had heard everything—and it raised Julien in her esteem. Well, at least this one wasn't born on his knees, she thought, like that old priest. God, the man's ugly.

At dinner, Julien didn't dare look at Mademoiselle de La Mole, but she was kind enough to say a few things to him. They were expecting a great many guests that evening, and she asked him to stay on. Girls in Paris don't much like men of a certain age, especially if they aren't perfectly dressed. Julien didn't need much intelligence to gather that Monsieur Le Bourguignon's colleagues

had the honor of being the usual butts of Mademoiselle de La Mole's jokes. On this day, there was no pretense on her part; she was openly rude to the boors.

Mademoiselle de La Mole was at the center of a little group who got together nearly every evening behind the immense armchair where the marquise sat. There were the Marquis de Croisenois, the Comte de Caylus, the Vicomte de Luz, and two or three young officers, friends of Norbert or his sister. The gentlemen all sat on a large blue sofa. At the other end of the sofa from where the brilliant Mathilde was sitting, Julien placed himself quietly on a little, low-slung wicker chair. That modest post was the envy of all the hangers-on; Norbert made it comfortable for his father's secretary by speaking to him or mentioning him two or three times in the evening. On this particular evening, Mademoiselle de La Mole had asked him if he knew the height of the mountain on which the Besançon citadel sat. Julien had no idea whether that mountain was higher or lower than Montmartre. He often laughed heartily at things said in the little group; but he felt himself incapable of coming up with anything suitable to say himself. It was if they spoke a foreign language that he could decipher but could not speak.

That evening, Mathilde's friends were all in a state of ongoing hostility toward the people who were pouring into the vast drawing room. The friends of the family took the most shots, as being the best known. The reader can imagine how attentive Julien was; everything interested him, from the facts to the way they were turned into joking matters.

"Ah! There's Monsieur Descoulis," said Mathilde. "But no wig tonight. Is he hoping to get his hands on a prefecture through his bare genius? I suppose displaying that bald forehead of his is a way of showing how full of great thoughts it is."

"The man knows everybody on earth," said the Marquis de Croisenois. "He shows up at my uncle's, the cardinal, too. He can maintain a lie with each of his friends for years at a time, and he must have two or three hundred friends. He knows how to feed friendships—that's his talent. Just as sure as he's standing there, you'll see him spattered with mud and standing outside some friend's door at seven on a winter morning.

“From time to time he stirs up a quarrel, and he’ll write seven or eight letters to keep it going. Then he’ll reconcile, and that’ll be followed by seven or eight letters rapturous with friendship. But his real forte is in the frank, sincere outpourings of a good, decent man. That maneuver gets deployed whenever he has a favor to ask. One of my uncle’s vicars-general is hilarious when he narrates the tale of Monsieur Descoulis’s life since the Restoration. I’ll bring him over sometime.”

“Bah—I wouldn’t put any stock in that kind of thing. It’s just professional jealousy among the lower classes,” said the Comte de Caylus.

“Oh, Monsieur Descoulis will go down in history, all right,” replied the marquis. “He brought about the Restoration, you know, along with Messieurs Talleyrand and Pozzo di Borgo.”<sup>30</sup>

“Millions have passed through that man’s hands,” said Norbert, “and I simply can’t fathom why he comes here to put up with my father’s epigrams, which are often abominable. Just the other day, he called out to him, all the way down the table, ‘how many friends have you betrayed today, my dear Descoulis?’”

“But did he really betray them?” asked Mademoiselle de La Mole, and then continued, “Who hasn’t betrayed someone?”

“What do I see?” said the Comte de Caylus to Norbert. “You have Monsieur Sainclair in your house? The famous Liberal—what the devil has he come here for? I have to go over there, talk to him, get him to talk. They say he’s awfully clever.”

“But how on earth did your mother let him in?” asked Monsieur de Croisenois. “He has such extravagant ideas, generous, independent ideas . . .”

“But look,” said Mademoiselle de La Mole, “there’s your independent man, practically scraping the earth before Monsieur Descoulis, and taking his hand. I half-expected him to kiss it next.”

“Well, this Descoulis must be more powerful than we thought,” replied Monsieur de Croisenois.

“Sainclair is here to get into the Académie,” said Norbert. “Look how he bows to Baron L\*\*\*, Croisenois.”<sup>31</sup>



“It’d be less fawning to get down on his knees,” replied Monsieur de Luz.

“My dear Sorel,” said Norbert, “you’re a man of intelligence, but you’ve just come down from your mountains. Try never to let yourself bow and scrape like that great poet, even if you were standing in front of God the Father.”

“Oh, now here’s your man of intellect par excellence: Baron Bâton!” said Mademoiselle de La Mole, imitating the voice of the servant who announced his entry.

“I swear, even your servants make fun of him. What a name: Baron Bâton!” said Monsieur de Caylus.

“What’s in a name?”—as he said to us the other day,” replied Mathilde. “Imagine the first time somebody announced the Duc de Bouillon; I really think people just need time to get used to it a little . . .”

Julien moved away from the group on the sofa. He hadn’t had time to learn to appreciate the charming nuances of light banter; if he were to laugh at a quip, it had to be based on something rational. But in these people he only saw a mood of denigrating everything in general, and it shocked him. His prudery—whether you call it provincial or English—went so far as to detect envy at the root of that tendency, though surely he was mistaken.

I’ve seen Comte Norbert, he said to himself, need three drafts to produce a twenty-line letter to his commanding officer. He’d be lucky if he could write a single page like Sainclair’s in the course of his entire life.

Passing through the crowd unobserved, due to his unimportance, Julien made his way over to several other groups in succession; he was following Baron Bâton at a distance, for he wanted to listen to him. That man of such great wit seemed uneasy, and Julien saw that he regained his comfort a little only when he had produced three or four witty sayings. Julien thought that this kind of wit needed plenty of room.

The baron could not produce little epigrams; he needed at least four sentences of six lines each if he were going to shine.

“*The man orates, he doesn’t converse,*” said someone standing behind Julien. He turned and blushed with pleasure upon hearing that the man’s name was Comte Chalvet. This was the cleverest man of the century. Julien had often

found his name mentioned in the *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*, and in the historical fragments dictated by Napoleon. Comte Chalvet spoke concisely; his wit expressed itself in flashes like lightning, precise, sharp, profound. When he spoke on some topic, immediately the discussion moved onto a new level. He brought facts to the conversation; listening to him was a pleasure. But when it came to politics, he was a brazen cynic.

“I happen to be independent,” he was saying to a gentleman sporting three medals on his chest, evidently making a little fun of him. “Why do people expect me to have the same opinions today that I had six weeks ago? If I did, my opinions would be in charge of me, rule me like a tyrant.”

Four solemn young men surrounded him, and when he said this, they all exchanged a frown; for these gentlemen, this was no joking matter. The comte saw that he had gone too far. Fortunately, he caught sight of the honest Monsieur Balland, a veritable Tartuffe of honesty. The comte began talking to him; people gathered around, realizing that poor Balland was about to be mauled. By dint of talking a great deal about morals and morality, Monsieur Balland, despite his considerable ugliness, had managed to marry a very rich woman, who died; then came a second rich wife, and this one was never seen in society. He enjoyed, in his moral and humble way, an income of sixty thousand francs, and he had attracted flatterers of his own. Comte Chalvet talked to him of all this pitilessly. Soon there were some thirty people circled around them. Everyone was smiling, even those solemn young men, the hopes of the century.

Why does he come here to Monsieur de La Mole’s, where he’s just a punching bag? wondered Julien. He walked over to Father Pirard to ask him.

Monsieur Balland slipped out.

“Good!” said Norbert. “That’s one less of my father’s spies. The only one left now is that little cripple Napier.”

“Could that be the clue to the riddle?” wondered Julien. “But if so, why does the marquis invite Monsieur Balland?”

The stern Father Pirard was grimacing in one corner of the room as he heard the names that the servants announced.

“What a den of thieves,” he said, sounding just like Bazile.<sup>32</sup> “They’re streaming in, every one of them corrupt.”

The trouble was that our stern priest couldn’t recognize the hallmarks of truly good society. But he had learned from his Jansenist friends about the kind of men who only get themselves invited into salons by carrying out certain schemes for interested parties, or by coming into a fortune of scandalous origins. That evening, for a few minutes he poured out his heart in response to Julien’s eager questions—and then abruptly stopped, crushed at realizing how much ill he had been speaking of everyone, considering it a sin. Irritable, Jansenist, and believing that Christian charity was a duty, his life in high society was a constant battle.

“What a face that Father Pirard has!” Mademoiselle de La Mole was saying as Julien returned to the area by the sofa.

This irritated Julien, but still, she had a point. Monsieur Pirard was, beyond question, the man with the most integrity in the entire room, but his mottled face, writhing in the pangs of conscience at the moment, rendered him truly hideous. Think more carefully about appearances after this, Julien said to himself. The abbé looks at his very worst when he is reproaching himself for some minor peccadillo. Meanwhile the face of that Napier, known to be a spy by everyone, radiates a pure, tranquil happiness. Yet the abbé had made tremendous concessions for this evening, going so far as to hire a valet to help ensure he was very well dressed.

Julien noticed something unusual going on in the drawing room: all eyes were turned toward the door, and the room grew almost quiet. The servant announced the famous Baron de Tolly, the focus of national attention after the recent elections. Julien made his way forward to get a better view of him. The baron presided over an electoral college,<sup>33</sup> and he had had the brilliant idea of making disappear the little slips of paper recording the votes of one of the parties. But this was not theft: in compensation for those slips of paper, he substituted other slips with names on them that he found acceptable. This decisive maneuver was observed by a number of electors who hastened to congratulate

the Baron de Tolly. The good man was still pale from the whole business. Some wicked tongues were muttering phrases like “to the galleys.”<sup>34</sup> Monsieur de La Mole greeted him coldly. The poor baron escaped quickly.

“If he’s leaving us so quickly, it’s to hurry over to see Monsieur Comte,”<sup>35</sup> said Comte Chalvet, and everyone laughed.

In the midst of all the dull noblemen and all the more or less corrupt but clever intriguers who kept arriving that evening in the drawing room of Monsieur de La Mole (for there was talk of his being named a minister), the little Tanbeau was making his debut. If his observations were not particularly sharp-witted yet, he made up for it by the vehemence of his rhetoric.

“Why shouldn’t that man be sentenced to ten years in prison?” he was saying when Julien came up to his group. “Reptiles should be kept in the lowest underground dungeons; they should be made to die in the darkness. What’s the point of giving him a thousand-écu fine? He’s a poor man, and that’s good, but his party will pay for him. He should get a fine of five hundred francs and ten years in a dungeon.”

Good God! Who is this monster he’s describing? wondered Julien, who was struck by the vehement tone and vigorous gestures of his colleague. The thin, drawn face of the academician’s favorite nephew was grotesque at that moment. Julien soon learned that he was talking about the greatest poet of the era.<sup>36</sup>

Oh, monster! exclaimed Julien, half aloud. Oh, you miserable wretch! he thought. I’ll make you pay for those words.

So these, he thought, are the lost children of the party that has the marquis as one of its leaders! And that illustrious man being libeled—how many decorations, how many sinecures would he have accumulated if he had simply sold himself out, not to the fawning ministry of Monsieur de Nerval,<sup>37</sup> but to one of the just passably honest ministries we’ve seen hold office!

Father Pirard, at a distance, made a sign for Julien to follow him; Monsieur de La Mole had just been speaking to him. But Julien at the moment felt he had to stay and listen, his eyes lowered, to the groaning complaints of a bishop, and when he was free to move away and rejoin his friend, he found him being

pestered by the detestable little Tanbeau. The little beast loathed the abbé, seeing him as the source of Julien's favored status, and so now he had come to pay court to him.

*"When will his death deliver us from that old heap of corruption?"* These were the terms, spoken with biblical energy, with which the little man of letters referred to Lord Holland. His special talent lay in careful research into the biographies of famous men, and he had just been making a rapid survey of which men might turn out to have influence with the new king of England.<sup>38</sup>

Father Pirard moved into an adjoining room; Julien followed him:

"The marquis has no love for scribblers, let me warn you; it's the one thing he hates. Know your Latin, Greek if you can, the histories of the Egyptians and the Persians, et cetera, and he'll honor and protect you as a scholar. But don't write so much a single page in French, and especially not on any serious matter beyond your social station. If you do, he'll brand you a scribbler and turn on you. How can you have been living in the hôtel of a great lord without having heard what the Duc de Castries said about d'Alembert and Rousseau: 'They want to have their say on everything, but they don't have so much as a thousand écus a year!'"

Julien thought, So everything is known here, just as it was in the seminary! He had written some ten pages that were quite emphatic: it was a sort of eulogy for the old surgeon-major who, as he put it, made a man of him. And that little notebook, Julien said to himself, was always under lock and key! He went right up to his room, burned the manuscript, and returned to the drawing room. All the clever people had gone, leaving only the ones with decorations.

Seated around the table, which the servants had brought in already set, were seven or eight ladies, all very highly born, very pious, and very affected, all between the ages of thirty and thirty-five. The superb Maréchale de Fervaques came in, making excuses for the lateness of the hour. It was after midnight; she took her place beside the marquise. Julien was deeply moved: she had eyes similar to those of Madame de Rênal, and a similar way of looking at a person.

There were still many people in the group around Mademoiselle de La Mole. Currently, she and her friends were busy mocking the unfortunate

Comte de Thaler. He was the only son of the Jew who became famous because of the wealth he had acquired in lending money to kings to make war on the people. The Jew had recently died, leaving his son an income of a hundred thousand écus a year, as well as a name that was only too widely known.<sup>39</sup> Such a situation demanded that a person have either a great simplicity of character or great strength of mind.

But unfortunately, the comte was only a decent sort of man, one who had taken on all sorts of pretensions that the flatterers surrounding him had encouraged.

Monsieur de Caylus claimed that one of those pretensions was the determination to ask for the hand of Mademoiselle de La Mole (to whom, incidentally, the Marquis of Croisenois, who was going to be a duke someday with a hundred thousand a year, was paying court).

“Oh no! Don’t accuse the man of having any resolve,” said Norbert, pity in his voice.

And indeed what was most lacking in the character of this poor Comte de Thaler was precisely willpower. In that regard, he was worthy of being made king. Constantly taking advice from everyone, he never had the courage to follow any one piece of advice all the way to the end.

“His facial features alone,” Mademoiselle de La Mole was saying, “would be enough to give me eternal joy.” That face was a singular mixture of unease and disappointment; but every once in a while one could see little outbursts of self-importance combined with the strong-minded tone one would expect from the wealthiest man in France, especially when the man was reasonably good-looking and had not yet reached thirty-six years of age. “He’s got a kind of timid insolence,” Monsieur de Croisenois was saying. The Comte de Caylus, Norbert, and two or three other mustached young men made fun of him to their hearts’ content without his ever catching on, and finally sent him on his way as one o’clock was sounding.

“Are those your famous Arabians you’ve got waiting for you outside in this weather?” Norbert asked him.

“No, it’s a new team, much less expensive,” replied Monsieur de Thaler.

“The horse on the left cost me five thousand francs, and the one on the right is worth only a hundred louis. But you see, I only bring that one out at night. His trot suits the other one perfectly.”

Norbert’s remark made the comte reflect that it was quite fitting for a man of his stature to have a passion for horses, and that he ought not to let his get wet. He left, and the other gentlemen left soon after, continuing to laugh at him.

So then, Julien thought, hearing their laughter as he made his way up the stairs, I’ve been given the chance to see the extreme opposite of my situation! I don’t make even twenty louis a year, and there I was right next to a man who makes that every hour, and people were laughing at him . . . A sight like that cures you of envy.

## 5

# SENSIBILITY, AND A PIOUS LADY

*An idea with any life in it seems crude, so accustomed have people become to lifeless talking. Cursed is the man who speaks interestingly!*

**FAUBLAS**<sup>40</sup>

After many months and many trials, this was the point Julien had reached when the house steward paid him his third-quarter salary. Monsieur de La Mole had tasked him with looking into the administration of his estates in Brittany and Normandy. Julien made several journeys there. He was now in charge of the correspondence relating to the famous Frilair lawsuit, having been fully instructed by Father Pirard.

From the short notes the marquis put in the margins of the various sorts of

letters addressed to him, Julien composed full letters, which almost always earned a signature.

At the theological school, his professors complained about his lack of effort, but they nonetheless regarded him as one of their most distinguished students. Taking on all these different kinds of work with all the energy of thwarted ambition had rapidly drained away the fresh complexion Julien had brought with him from his provincial life. His pallor was a mark in his favor in the eyes of his fellow seminarians. He in turn found them less vile, and much less likely to genuflect before an écu than those in Besançon; they assumed he had contracted consumption. The marquis had given him a horse.

Fearing they might catch sight of him out riding, Julien told them that the doctors had ordered him to take this exercise. Father Pirard had taken him to a number of Jansenist gatherings. Julien was astonished: the idea of religion had become inextricably bound up, in his mind, with hypocrisy and the pursuit of money. He marveled at these pious, austere men who gave no thought to their financial accounts. A number of Jansenists had taken a friendly liking to him and offered him advice. A new world opened up before him. He met, among the Jansenists, the six-foot-tall Count Altamira, a liberal condemned to death in his home country, and a devout man.<sup>41</sup> That strange contrast—devotion plus the love of liberty—made a powerful impression on him.

Julien had fallen out of favor with the young count. Norbert had felt he reacted a little too warmly to some of the witticisms of his friends. Julien, after committing more than one faux pas, sternly forbade himself to speak to Made-moiselle de La Mole at all. They were always perfectly polite in their dealings with him at the Hôtel de La Mole, but Julien felt he had clearly fallen. His solid provincial sense explained it all by means of the popular proverb: *everybody loves the new boy*.

He might have been seeing things a little more clearly now, compared to his first days there, or perhaps Parisian urbanity had lost its enchantment for him.

Whenever he ceased working, he fell prey to a deadly boredom; this is the soul-deadening effect of that perfect politeness so measured, so perfectly



graded to suit the level of the situation, that characterizes life in high society. Any heart that retains even a little sensitivity feels the artifice of it all.

Of course, provincials can be accused of a too common, too unpolished tone. But they do let a little feeling show when they respond to you. No one at the Hôtel de La Mole ever did anything to wound Julien's self-esteem, but nonetheless, he very often felt like weeping at the end of the day. In the provinces, a café waiter would take an interest in you if some little accident befell you upon entering his café. But if that accident had anything in it that could prick your self-esteem, he would, while commiserating with you, repeat the word that's torturing you ten times at least. In Paris, people only laugh at you behind your back, but you always remain a stranger.

We'll pass over in silence a host of little events that would have made Julien the target of ridicule, if he were not, in a sense, beneath ridicule. His excessive self-consciousness led him into a thousand blunders. All his pleasures took the form of precautions: he practiced shooting his pistols daily, and he was one of the most famous fencing master's best students.<sup>42</sup> Whenever he could spare some time, he hurried over to the stables and asked to ride the most vicious horses. In his rides with the riding master, he was inevitably thrown.

The marquis found him useful because of his stubborn hard work, his discretion, and his intelligence, and little by little he turned over to him all his difficult or complicated business affairs. When his own high-flying ambitions left him any leisure, the marquis handled his affairs wisely; being in a position to hear all the news, he speculated with success. He bought houses, woodlands; but he was easily offended. He would give away hundreds of louis, and then go to court over hundreds of francs. Wealthy men with heart are in search of amusement, not profits, from their dealings. The marquis needed a chief of staff who could put all his money affairs into clear, readily understandable order.

Madame de La Mole, despite her being a woman of restrained character, often made fun of Julien. A man of any sensibility is often *unpredictable*, and that is horrifying to great ladies; it's the polar opposite of conventional behavior. Two or three times, the marquis defended Julien: he may be ridiculous in your

drawing room, but he's a hero in his office. Julien, for his part, thought he might have figured out the secret of the marquise. She condescended to let herself appear interested whenever her servants announced the arrival of Baron de La Jomate. His was a cold, impassive expression. He was short, thin, ugly, very well dressed, spent all his time at the palace, and in general had nothing to say about anything. He thought about as much as he talked. Madame de La Mole would have been passionately happy—for the first time in her life—if she could have snared him as a husband for her daughter.

## 6

# THE RIGHT ACCENT

*Their great mission is to calmly pass judgment on the minutiae of the daily life of nations. Their wisdom must be to stop small events causing furious rage, or to keep the voice of rumor from magnifying things.*

GRATIUS<sup>43</sup>

For a newcomer who, because of his pride, did not ask many questions, Julien didn't commit any very serious blunders. One day, when a sudden cloudburst made him seek shelter in a café in the rue Saint-Honoré, a big man in a beaver overcoat, taking umbrage at his sullen stare, stared right back at him, exactly the way Mademoiselle Amanda's lover had done in the café in Besançon.

Julien had reproached himself so often for letting that earlier offense go that he refused to tolerate this one. He demanded an explanation. The man in the overcoat spewed the foulest insults at him. Everyone in the café stood up and gathered around them; passersby stopped to look in at the door. With the typical provincial's precaution, Julien always carried his small pistols with him; in a convulsive movement, his hand clenched one in his pocket. But he was care-

ful, and he contented himself with repeating over and over again: *Monsieur, your address? I despise you.*

The crowd found his persistent repetition of those six words impressive.

But damn it! This loudmouth has to give me his address! The man in the overcoat, hearing this so often repeated, threw in Julien's face five or six visiting cards. Fortunately, none of them struck him, for he promised himself that he would use his pistols on the spot if he were touched. The man went away, but kept turning around, shaking his fist at Julien, and shouting insults.

Julien realized he was bathed in sweat. So the lowest of all mortals has it in his power to get me this upset! he said to himself in a rage. How can I kill off this humiliating sensitivity of mine?

But first, where was he to find somebody to be his second? He had no friend. He had made several acquaintances, but every one of them had, after six weeks or so, fallen by the wayside. I'm not sociable enough, he thought, and now I pay the price for it. Finally he remembered an ex-lieutenant from the Ninety-Sixth, named Lieven, a poor devil with whom he often fenced. Julien told him the situation truthfully.

"I'll be glad to be your second," Lieven said, "but on one condition: if you fail to wound your man, you'll fight with me, right there on the spot."

This delighted Julien. "Agreed," he said, and the two of them went off to find Monsieur C. de Beauvoisis at the address indicated on the visiting cards, in the heart of the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

At seven in the morning they arrived, and when they were being announced, Julien wondered if this might possibly be the young relative of Madame de Rênal, who had at one time been employed in the embassy at either Rome or Naples, and who had provided a letter of recommendation for the singer Geronimo.

Julien had given the tall valet one of the cards thrown at him the day before, along with one of his own.

They were made to wait, he and his second, for a long three-quarters of an hour; at last they were ushered into an apartment of admirable elegance. There

they found a tall young man, dressed like a doll; his features were as perfect, and as insignificant, as those of a Greek statue. His head, unusually narrow, had piled atop it a pyramid of the most beautiful blond hair. It had been curled and set with the greatest of care, and not one hair was out of place. That's why this miserable fop made us wait so long, thought the lieutenant of the Ninety-Sixth: to get his hair curled. His striped dressing gown, his morning trousers—everything about him, down to his embroidered slippers—was perfect and superbly immaculate. His face, aristocratic and vacuous, hinted that any ideas he might have would be both conventional and rare: he was the ideal of the amiable man, horrified at the prospect of the unexpected or the humorous, steeped in dignity.

Julien, when his lieutenant from the Ninety-Sixth had explained to him that being kept waiting for such a long time after having had the cards thrown in his face was itself another affront, now strode brusquely into Monsieur de Beauvoisis's apartment. He intended to be insolent, but at the same time he wanted to take just the right tone.

He was so forcibly struck by the gentleness of the manners of Monsieur de Beauvoisis, as well as by his perfectly composed air, important and content with himself, and by the admirable elegance surrounding him, that he immediately dropped any thought of being insolent. This was not the man from yesterday. He was so surprised at encountering someone here as distinguished as the one in the café had been crude that he couldn't bring himself to say a word. He handed him one of the cards that had been thrown at him.

"This is my name," said the elegant man, to whom Julien's black suit, worn at seven in the morning, inspired very little respect, "but I do not understand. If you would honor me . . ."

His tone of voice caused some of Julien's anger to flare up again. "I've come here to challenge you, Monsieur," and he went on to explain the affair.

Monsieur Charles de Beauvoisis took a moment to think it through, and decided he was satisfied with the cut of Julien's black suit. Staub's, definitely, he thought as he listened.<sup>44</sup> The jacket is in good taste, and the boots are good.

But still, a black suit first thing in the morning! . . . Ah, perhaps it's to slow the bullet, thought the Chevalier de Beauvoisis.

Once he had been given this explanation, he reverted to his impeccable politeness, treating Julien almost as an equal. The conversation was long, the matter delicate; but in the end, Julien could not dispute the evidence. The young man before him, so well-born, had no resemblance whatsoever to the vulgar person who, the day before, had insulted him.

Julien felt a strong reluctance to leave; he tried to keep the discussion going. He observed the self-possession of the Chevalier de Beauvoisis—for that is how he referred to himself, having been rather shocked at Julien's addressing him simply as Monsieur.

He admired the man's gravity, and the way it blended with a certain modest complacency that never abandoned him for so much as an instant. He was struck by his odd way of moving his tongue when he pronounced certain words . . . But after all, there wasn't anything in all this that could be considered the slightest reason for any sort of quarrel.

The young diplomat offered to duel, and quite gracefully, but the ex-lieutenant of the Ninety-Sixth, having sat there for an hour with his legs apart and his hands on his thighs, elbows out, decided that his friend Monsieur Sorel was by no means born to be the kind of man who would pick a German quarrel<sup>45</sup> with a man, just because someone had stolen his visiting cards.

When they left, Julien was in a foul mood. The carriage of the Chevalier de Beauvoisis was waiting for him in the courtyard, in front of the steps; Julien happened to raise his eyes, and he saw the man from the day before in the carriage.

Seeing the man, grabbing hold of his overcoat, pulling him off his seat, and beating him with a riding whip was the affair of a moment. Two servants tried to defend their colleague; Julien received some blows with fists, but pulling out one of his small pistols and aiming it at them was enough for them to run away. The whole business was over in a minute.

The Chevalier de Beauvoisis came slowly down the steps, repeating, with

the accent peculiar to the grand lords, "But what's all this? What's all this?" He was obviously very curious, but his diplomatic importance would not allow him to show any strong interest. When he understood what the issue was, his aristocratic hauteur had to do battle with the slightly amused coolness that must never leave the face of the diplomat.

The lieutenant of the Ninety-Sixth could tell that Monsieur de Beauvoisis now was ready for a fight; he, acting diplomatically enough himself, wanted his friend to maintain the privilege of initiating the fight. "Well now!" he cried. "I believe we do have something to duel over!" The diplomat replied, "I believe we do."

"I'm dismissing that villain," he said to his servants. "Let someone else drive." They opened the carriage door: the Chevalier insisted that Julien and his second should get in first. They drove off to find a friend of Monsieur de Beauvoisis, who suggested a quiet location. The conversation along the way was very good. The only strange thing was the diplomat still wearing his dressing gown.

These people, even though they're nobles, thought Julien, aren't at all like the bores who come to dinner with Monsieur de La Mole. An instant later, he added, and I can see why: they aren't afraid to be a little improper. They talked about the ballet dancers the audience had applauded the evening before. The two gentlemen alluded to spicy anecdotes about which Julien and his second knew absolutely nothing. Julien was not fool enough to pretend he knew them; he admitted his ignorance with a good grace. His frankness pleased the chevalier's friend; he explained the anecdotes in greater detail, and very well too.

One thing astonished Julien no end. An altar of repose, set up in the street for the Corpus Christi Day procession, made the carriage come to a stop for a moment. The two gentlemen freely exchanged some jokes; the priest behind them was the son of an archbishop. Never at the home of the Marquis de La Mole, who had hopes of being made a duke, would anyone dare say such a thing.

The duel was over in an instant: Julien took a bullet in his arm; they bandaged it with handkerchiefs after soaking them in brandy, and the Chevalier de

Beauvoisis very politely asked Julien if he could take him home in the carriage that had brought them there. When Julien named the Hôtel de La Mole, the young diplomat and his friend exchanged a glance. Julien's cab was there, but he found the conversation of these gentlemen infinitely more amusing than that of the lieutenant of the Ninety-Sixth.

My God! Is that all there is to a duel? thought Julien. What good luck it was to come across that coachman again! And how miserable I would have been if I'd had to go on resenting that insult in the café! The amusing conversation carried on almost as if there had been no interruption. Julien understood then that this diplomatic affectation had its uses.

So boredom isn't inevitable, he said to himself, with the conversation of men of high birth! These two make jokes about the Corpus Christi procession, and they boldly tell risqué anecdotes, with plenty of vivid details. The only thing they lack is awareness of the political scene, but that lack is more than compensated by the gracefulness of their tone and the elegance of their expression. Julien felt a strong attraction to them. I wish I could see them often!

As soon as the group broke up, the Chevalier de Beauvoisis began making inquiries: the answers he got were not exactly stellar.

He was very interested in getting to know this man, but would it be decent for him to go pay him a visit? The few things he'd been able to learn were not encouraging.

"It's all perfectly awful!" he said to his second. "I can't admit to having fought a duel with a simple secretary to Monsieur de La Mole, and even worse, because my coachman stole some of my cards."

"The possibility of ridicule is there, all right."

That same evening, the Chevalier de Beauvoisis and his friend went out separately spreading the story that a certain Monsieur Sorel, in other respects a perfect gentleman, was the illegitimate son of an intimate friend of the Marquis de La Mole. People readily accepted the story. Once it was widely established, the young diplomat and his friend paid several visits to Julien during the two weeks he was recuperating in his room. Julien admitted to them that he had never been to the Opéra.

“But that’s impossible,” they said. “It’s really the only place to go; we’ll have to make your first time there *The Comte Ory*.”<sup>46</sup>

At the Opéra, the Chevalier de Beauvoisis introduced him to the famous singer Geronimo, who was at the time enjoying enormous success.

Julien practically courted the chevalier: the strange mix of self-respect, mysterious importance, and youthful affectation enchanted him. For example, the chevalier stuttered a little, because he had had the honor of frequently visiting a great lord who had that speech defect. Julien had never seen one person combine within himself an amusing ridiculousness and the perfection in manners that a poor provincial must try to imitate.

He was seen at the Opéra with the Chevalier de Beauvoisis; this connection ensured that people would be mentioning his name.

“Well now!” said Monsieur de La Mole one day. “I hear you’re the natural child of some wealthy gentleman in the Franche-Comté, my close friend?”

The marquis immediately cut Julien off as he began to protest that he had had nothing to do with spreading that rumor.

“Monsieur de Beauvoisis did not want to have dueled with the son of a carpenter.”

“I understand, I understand,” said Monsieur de La Mole. “It’s up to me now to give credence to the rumor—and it suits me to do so. But I have one favor to ask of you, and it will only take a half hour or so of your time: every Opéra day,<sup>47</sup> at eleven thirty, go out into the foyer and mingle with fashionable people. I still see some traits of the provincial in you, and you need to shed them. Anyway, it’s not a bad thing to get to know, by sight at least, some of the important people to whom I might send you one day on business. Stop at the box office to make yourself known. You’ll have free entry.”



# AN ATTACK OF GOUT

*And I was promoted, not because of merit,  
but because my master had the gout.*

BERTOLOTTI<sup>48</sup>

The reader may perhaps be surprised at this relaxed, almost friendly tone; we have forgotten to mention that the marquis had been confined to the house for the last six weeks by an attack of gout.

Mademoiselle de La Mole and her mother were in Hyères, along with the marquis's mother. Comte Norbert only saw his father for a moment here and there; they got along well enough, but they didn't have much to say to each other. Monsieur de La Mole, reduced therefore to Julien, was surprised to find he actually had ideas. He made him read the papers aloud to him. Soon the young secretary was able to pick out the most interesting articles. A new paper had just been published, which the marquis despised;<sup>49</sup> he swore he would never open it, but nonetheless he spoke of it every day. Julien was amused. The marquis, irritated with the present, had Julien read Titus Livy to him; he found Julien's improvised translation from the Latin entertaining.

One day the marquis said, employing that extreme tone of politeness that often tested Julien's patience:

"Allow me, my dear Sorel, to make you a present of a blue suit. When it is convenient for you to put it on and come visit me, you will be in my eyes the younger brother of the Comte de Chaulnes—that is, the son of my friend the old duke."<sup>50</sup>

Julien could not quite figure out what all this meant; that same night, he gave it a try, coming down for a visit wearing the blue suit. The marquis treated

him as an equal. Julien had the kind of heart capable of appreciating real politeness, but nuances were lost on him. He would have sworn, before the marquis had taken up this new whim, that he could not possibly be treated with more respect. What a wonderful skill the man has! thought Julien. When he got up to leave, the Marquis excused himself from seeing him to the door, because of his gout.

Julien could not get over this outlandish situation: is he laughing at me? he wondered. He went to ask Father Pirard for advice, but the priest, less polished than the marquis, merely emitted a whistle and changed the subject. The next morning, Julien came to the marquis wearing his black suit, with his portfolio and his letters to be signed. He was received in the old manner. That evening, with the blue suit on, the tone was entirely different, and every bit as polite as it had been the previous day.

“Since you don’t seem to be too bored by the visits you’re so good as to make to a poor, sick old man,” the marquis said to him, “you must tell me about all the little events in your life, but with perfect frankness, and with no other agenda than to narrate them clearly and in an amusing manner. Because being amused is a necessary thing,” the marquis continued. “It’s the only real thing in life. A man can’t save my life in a war every day or give me a gift of a million francs. But if I had Rivarol here next to my couch, every day he could take away an hour of pain or boredom. I saw him frequently in Hamburg, during the Emigration.”<sup>51</sup>

And the marquis told Julien anecdotes about Rivarol among the citizens of Hamburg; they would get together in groups of four to decipher his clever sayings.

Monsieur de La Mole, reduced to the society of his little abbé, wanted to get him livened up. By appealing to Julien’s pride, he encouraged his sense of honor. Since the truth was asked for, Julien decided that he would indeed tell all, except for two things upon which he would remain silent: his fanatical admiration for a man whose name would infuriate the marquis, and his complete religious unbelief, which clearly did not suit a future curé. His little business

with the Chevalier de Beauvoisis came at just the right time. The marquis laughed until tears came to his eyes at the scene in the café on the rue Saint-Honoré, with the coachman hurling the foulest insults at him. This was a time of perfect openness between master and protégé.

Monsieur de La Mole became interested in this unusual character. At the beginning he toyed with Julien's absurdities, the better to enjoy them; but soon he found it more interesting to correct, in a gentle way, the young man's erroneous ways of looking at things. Other provincials arrive in Paris admiring everything they see, thought the marquis, but this one detests everything. The former have too much affectation, this one not enough, and so the fools take him for a fool.

The attack of gout was prolonged when the cold winter weather set in, and it lasted several months.

People get attached to a nice spaniel, the marquis said to himself, so why should I be ashamed of my attachment to this little abbé? He's an original. I'm treating him like a son—well, what's so bad about that? This little fantasy, if it continues, will end up costing me a five-hundred-louis diamond in my will.

Now that the marquis had come to see the strength of his protégé's character, every day he gave him some new task.

Julien was frightened when he saw the great lord sometimes gave him contradictory decisions on the same subject.

This could end in compromising him seriously. Julien never failed to bring along his notebook when he worked with the marquis; he wrote down the instructions, and had the marquis initial them. Julien had taken on a clerk who transcribed all the instructions regarding each affair into a special register. Into this register was also copied every letter.

This idea at first seemed the very height of pointless tedium. But in less than two months, the marquis began to see the advantages. Julien suggested they hire a clerk from a banking house, one who could keep a double-entry account, with every receipt and every expenditure regarding the estates Julien was charged with managing.

These measures so perfectly clarified his own affairs for the marquis that he gave himself permission to enjoy two or three new speculations without involving his broker, who was robbing him.

“Take three thousand francs for yourself,” he said one day to his young minister.

“Oh, Monsieur, that would leave me open to criticism.”

“Well, what do you want to do then?” asked the marquis, annoyed.

“Why don’t you make up a formal warrant and write it in the register in your own hand; the warrant will be paying me three thousand francs. And incidentally, it was actually Father Pirard who came up with the idea of all this careful accounting.” The marquis—his face taking on the bored expression of the Marquis de Moncade listening to his steward Monsieur Poisson narrating his accounts—went ahead and wrote up the warrant.<sup>52</sup>

That evening, when Julien appeared wearing his blue suit, there was no question of business matters. The kindnesses of the marquis were so flattering to the delicate, easily wounded self-esteem of our hero that soon, despite himself, he began to feel an affection for the amiable old man. Not that Julien was a man of feeling—as that term is understood in Paris—but on the other hand, he was no monster, and no one, since the death of the old surgeon-major, had spoken to him with such kindness. He observed, with some surprise, that the marquis delicately avoided anything that might wound his pride, something the surgeon-major never had done. He came to understand that the surgeon had been prouder of his cross than the marquis was of his blue sash. The father of the marquis was a great lord.<sup>53</sup>

One day, at the end of their morning’s work together, Julien, wearing his black suit so as to talk business, ended up entertaining the marquis, who kept him there for two hours, and insisted upon giving him some bank notes his broker had just brought from the Bourse.

“Ah, Monsieur le Marquis, I hope it will not lessen in any way the great respect I feel for you if I ask you to permit me to say something.”

“Go ahead, my friend.”

“I hope the marquis will permit me to refuse this gift. It is not addressed to

the man in the black suit, and it would only spoil the kind of behavior that Monsieur le Marquis is so kind as to tolerate from the man in blue.” He made a deep, respectful bow, and left without waiting for an answer.

This amused the marquis. He told the story that evening to the abbé Pirard.

“I must confide something in you, my dear abbé. I know the secret truth of Julien’s birth, and I authorize you not to keep this confidence secret.”

The Marquis thought, “His conduct this morning was noble, and I’m going to ennoble him.”

After some time had passed, the marquis was feeling well enough to leave his room.

“Go spend two months in London,” he told Julien. “The special couriers and others will bring you the letters I get in the meantime, along with my notes. You can write the replies and send them back along with the letters. I calculate that the delay will be no longer than five days.”

Making his way quickly to Calais, Julien felt amazed at the triviality of the business he was being sent to do.

We will not describe anything of the mingled hatred and horror he felt when he stood upon English soil. We know his mad infatuation with Bonaparte. He saw in every officer a Sir Hudson Lowe, in every nobleman a Lord Bathurst ordering the infamies on Saint Helena, and getting, for his reward, a ten-year post in the Cabinet.<sup>54</sup>

In London he came face-to-face with the very height of smug complacency. He became friends with some young Russian noblemen, who initiated him.

“My dear Sorel,” they said, “you were destined to be here; you have that frozen facial expression that seems to say, ‘*I am a thousand miles away from the present moment,*’ and you come by it naturally. The rest of us are all trying to achieve it.”

“You haven’t yet understood our era,” Prince Korasoff said: “*Always do the opposite of what’s expected of you.* I swear on my honor, that is the sole religion of our time.<sup>55</sup> Don’t be a fool, and don’t be affected—because if you do, people will expect folly and affectation from you, and that would end up violating the rule.”

Julien covered himself in glory one day, in the drawing room of the Duke of Fitz-Folke,<sup>56</sup> who had invited both him and Prince Korasoff to dine. They were kept waiting an hour. The manner in which Julien conducted himself amidst those twenty people who were all kept waiting is still legendary among the young embassy secretaries in London. His expression was priceless.

He wanted to see—though his friends the dandies did not—the celebrated Philip Vane, the only philosopher England has produced since John Locke.<sup>57</sup> He met him during his seventh year in prison. The aristocracy doesn't play around in this country, thought Julien; as if prison weren't enough, Vane is also dishonored, vilified, etc.

Julien found him in fine spirits; the rage of the aristocracy kept him entertained. This, thought Julien, is the only cheerful man I've met in England.

*"The idea that tyrants find most useful is that of God,"* Vane had said to him.<sup>58</sup>

We shall say no more about his philosophy, which would be accused of *cynicism*.

Upon his return: "Well, what amusing anecdotes have you brought me from England?" asked Monsieur de La Mole. He hesitated . . . "Come on then—what can you tell me, whether it's amusing or not?" the marquis insisted.

*"Primo,"* said Julien, "the wisest Englishman is insane one hour a day, when he is visited by the demon of suicide, who is the country's god.

"Secondly, wit and genius lose twenty-five percent of their value the moment they get off the boat in England.

"Thirdly, nothing in this world is as beautiful, admirable, and moving as the English countryside."

"All right. My turn," said the marquis.

*"Primo,"* why did you say, at the ball given by the Russian ambassador, that there are three hundred thousand young men in France who passionately want war? Do you actually think this is something kings would like to hear?"

"How is one supposed to talk with these grand diplomats?" asked Julien. "They start up conversations on deeply serious topics. If you stick to repeating the commonplaces the papers always print, they'll take you for a fool. But if

you allow yourself to say something true, or something novel, they're astonished, their tongues are tied, and at seven the next morning they let you know, via the ambassador's main secretary, that what you said was inappropriate."

"Not bad," said the marquis, laughing. "But apart from all that, Monsieur Deep Thinker, I'll bet you haven't figured out why it was that I sent you to England."

"Begging your pardon," Julien replied, "but it was so that I could dine once a week with the king's ambassador, the most courteous of men."

"No. You went there to get the cross you see in front of you," said the marquis.<sup>59</sup> "I don't wish to see you stop wearing your black suit, and I'm accustomed now to the more entertaining tone I can take with the man in the blue one. So until further notice, here's how we'll proceed: when I see you wearing this cross, you'll be the youngest son of my friend the Duc de Chaulnes, who, without knowing it, has been employed in the diplomatic corps for the last six months. And take note," the marquis continued with a more serious tone, dropping the gracious air he had been using, "I most certainly do not want to raise you up out of your station. That never works out, and it ends up hurting the protector as well as the protégé. When my lawsuits grow too boring for you, or you aren't comfortable here anymore, I'll seek out a good parish for you, like the one I got for our friend Father Pirard—and *nothing more*," he added, drily.

The cross did its work on Julien's pride; he spoke up much more freely. He felt offended less often and was less inclined to assume he was the subject of some overheard remarks, the kind of things anybody can let slip in the course of an animated conversation.

The cross also led to an unusual visitor: none other than Monsieur le Baron de Valenod, who had come to Paris to thank the ministry for granting him the title, and to establish contacts there. He had just been named mayor of Verrières, replacing Monsieur de Rênal.

Julien couldn't help laughing to himself when Monsieur de Valenod told him that Monsieur de Rênal's being a Jacobin had just been discovered. The fact was that in the new election, which was in process, the new baron was the government's preferred candidate, and in the département's electoral college,

a stronghold of Ultras, Monsieur de Rênal was the candidate supported by the Liberals.<sup>60</sup>

Julien tried but was unable to learn anything about Madame de Rênal: the baron evidently remembered their old rivalry and was impenetrable on the subject. He ended by asking Julien for his father's vote in the elections. Julien promised to write to him.

"You should, my dear Chevalier, introduce me to the Marquis de La Mole."

Oh, I certainly should, but what a villain! thought Julien.

"The fact is, I don't have the kind of status in the Hôtel de La Mole that would entitle me to introduce people."

Julien told all this to the marquis that evening, telling him about Valenod's pretensions and all his grand accomplishments since 1814.

"You will in fact," replied Monsieur de La Mole, "introduce the new baron to me tomorrow, and not only that, but I'll invite him to dinner for the day following. He'll be one of our new prefects."

"In that case," said Julien coldly, "I'll ask you to give my father the post of poorhouse director."

"That's good!" said the marquis, resuming his cheerful air. "I agree. I was expecting to get a sermon from you. You're beginning to learn."

Julien heard from Monsieur de Valenod that the man who was in charge of the lottery in Verrières had recently died; Julien found it pleasant to give this position to Monsieur de Cholin, the old imbecile whose petition he had picked up and read in the room that the Marquis de La Mole had occupied. The marquis had a good laugh at the petition when Julien read it to him, having him sign the letter requesting the position from the minister of finance.

Monsieur de Cholin had no sooner been appointed to the post than Julien learned that Monsieur Gros, the famous geometrician, had wanted it and had been supported by the députés of the département. That generous man had an income of only fourteen hundred francs, and every year he had been lending six hundred to the holder of the post, now deceased, who needed the help in bringing up his family.

Julien was startled to see what he had done. But it's nothing, he said to him-



self. I'll have to commit plenty of other injustices if I want to succeed, and I'll have to conceal them under pretty sentimental phrases too. Poor Monsieur Gros—he's the one who deserves this cross, but I'm the one who has it, and I have to act in accordance with the desires of the government that gave it to me.

## 8

# WHICH DECORATION IS MOST DISTINGUISHED?

*"Your water isn't at all refreshing," said the thirsty genie.*

*"All the same, it's from the deepest well in Diar-Bekir."*

PELLICO<sup>61</sup>

One day, Julien was returning from the charming estate at Villequier, on the banks of the Seine, in which Monsieur de La Mole took a special interest because it was the only one of his estates that had belonged to the famous Boniface de La Mole. In the Paris home, he found the marquise and her daughter, who had just come back from Hyères.

Julien was now a dandy and had learned the art of living in Paris. He took what was exactly the proper, cool tone toward Mademoiselle de La Mole. He seemed to have no memory of the days when she laughed and asked him for more details about his fall from the horse.

Mademoiselle de La Mole thought he looked taller and paler. His manner and his clothes no longer had anything of the provincial about them, but this was not true of his conversation, for he was still too serious, too definite. But despite his careful tone, thanks to his pride, there was nothing of the subaltern

about him; it was just that he seemed to think too many things were important. But there was no doubt this was a man who would stand by anything he said.

“He lacks the light touch, but he’s intelligent,” said Mademoiselle de La Mole to her father, joking with him about the cross he had given to Julien. “My brother has been asking you for one for the last year and a half, and he’s a La Mole!”

“Yes, but Julien isn’t conventional. And that is not the case with the La Mole you’ve just mentioned.”

The arrival of the Duc de Retz was announced.

Mathilde felt a yawn come over her irresistibly; she recognized all the old gilding and all the old habitués of her father’s drawing room. She pictured to herself the perfectly boring life she was going to be living here in Paris. And yet, when she was in Hyères, she missed Paris.

And I’m nineteen years old! she thought. That’s the age you’re supposed to be happy, according to all these gilt-edged fools. She was looking at a set of nine or ten volumes of new poetry that had accumulated on the table while she was in Provence. She was unfortunate enough to be more intelligent than Messieurs de Croisenois, de Caylus, de Luz, and all her other friends. She imagined all the things they’d be saying to her about the beautiful skies in Provence, about poetry, about the south, etc., etc.

And now those eyes, those lovely eyes in which the deepest boredom was evident—or worse yet, in which one could see despair at ever finding any real pleasure in life—those eyes now came to rest on Julien. At least he wasn’t exactly like all the others.

“Monsieur Sorel,” she said to him, in that sharp, clipped voice of hers, with nothing feminine in it, the voice employed by young ladies of the highest rank.

“Monsieur Sorel, will you be going to the ball tonight at the home of Monsieur de Retz?”

“Mademoiselle, I have not had the honor of being introduced to Monsieur le Duc.” (You would have thought saying those words and that title stuck in the throat of the proud provincial.)

“He’s asked my brother to bring you, and if you do come, you can tell me

about the Villequier estate. We're thinking about going there in the spring. I'd like to find out if the chateau is livable, and if the neighborhood is as pretty as they say. There are so many undeserved reputations!"

Julien made no response.

"Come to the ball with my brother," she added, in an even harsher tone.

Julien bowed respectfully. And so, even in the middle of a ball, I have to trot out my account book for every member of the family. After all, aren't I being paid to manage their business? His foul mood made him add: And God only knows whether what I say to the daughter will clash with the plans of the father, or the brother, or the mother! It's like the court of a prince. You have to be a perfect nonentity, but manage not to give anybody cause to complain.

How I dislike that tall girl! he thought, watching Mademoiselle de La Mole walking over to her mother, who had called her in order to introduce her to several women friends. She takes up every new fashion and takes it too far. Her gown is trailing off her shoulders . . . she's even paler than she was before her trip . . . And that hair—it's blond, but so colorless, it's as if the light passes right through it! . . . Look at the arrogance in the way she greets people, in that expression of hers! The gestures of a queen! Mademoiselle de La Mole called her brother over to her, just as he was about to exit the drawing room.

Comte Norbert came up to Julien:

"My dear Sorel," he said, "where shall I pick you up at midnight,<sup>62</sup> to go to Monsieur de Retz's ball? He explicitly asked me to bring you."

"I know perfectly well to whom I owe such kindness," said Julian, making an overly deep bow.

Julien's bad temper, finding nothing it could possibly object to in the tone of civility and even personal interest with which Norbert had addressed him, got to work on shaping this response to the pleasant invitation. He knew there was a touch of servility in it.

That evening, upon arriving at the ball, he was struck by the magnificence of the Hôtel de Retz. The courtyard in front was covered with an enormous awning of crimson fabric, spangled with golden stars: nothing could have been more elegant. Beneath the awning, the courtyard had been transformed into a

grove of orange trees and oleanders in blossom. Great care had been taken to get the pots buried deep enough so that the oleanders and the orange trees seemed to rise directly out of the soil. The carriage drive was covered with sand.

The sight of it all struck our provincial as extraordinary. He had had no idea of such magnificence; in an instant his imagination took flight, leaving his bad temper a thousand miles behind. In the carriage on the way to the ball, Norbert had been cheerful while he saw everything at its blackest; once they entered the courtyard, their moods reversed.

Norbert only noticed a certain few details that, among that magnificent display, had been overlooked. He calculated the cost of everything, and as the grand total got higher and higher, Julien noticed that he seemed almost jealous, and his mood sank.

As for himself, he was completely enthralled, his emotion rendering him almost shy when they entered the first of the rooms for dancing. There was a crowd at the door into the second room, so many people that there was no way to move. This second room was decorated to look like the Alhambra in Grenada.

"She's the belle of the ball, you have to admit it," a young man with a mustache was saying as his shoulder was thrust into Julien's chest.

His neighbor replied, "Mademoiselle Fourmont was the prettiest all winter, but now you can tell she knows she's fallen into second place. Look at her strange air."

"She's in full sail, all right. Look, look at that graceful smile while she dances alone in this contredanse. I swear, it's priceless."

"Mademoiselle de La Mole looks like she's in perfect control of the pleasure her triumph is giving her, and she certainly knows it's a triumph. She looks almost as if she's afraid of being too attractive to anyone who speaks to her."

"Yes! Now that's the true art of seduction."

Julien made a number of efforts in vain to get a look at the seductive woman; seven or eight taller men blocked his view.

"There's a lot of coquettishness in that noble restraint of hers," the young man with the mustache said.

“And those big blue eyes that lower themselves just when you think she’s on the point of giving herself away,” his neighbor said. “Good heavens, such skill!”

“Look how common the beautiful Fourmont looks next to her,” said a third.

“That restraint of hers—it seems to be saying, ‘I could be so charming to you if only you were worthy of me!’”

“But then who could be worthy of the sublime Mathilde?” said the first.

“Some sovereign prince, handsome, clever, well built, a war hero, about twenty years old at the very most.”

“The natural son of the Russian emperor . . . but for the marriage, he’d need to have a kingdom granted him . . . or maybe just the Comte de Thaler, looking the way he does, like a peasant all dressed up . . .”

The throng at the door thinned, and Julien was able to enter.

Since she seems so exceptional to these little puppets, she’s worth my study, he thought. I need to find out what makes her so perfect in the eyes of those men.

As he looked around the room for her, Mathilde was looking at him. My duty calls me, Julien thought, but his only bad temper was in the expression on his face. Curiosity made him advance through the room with pleasure—a pleasure greatly augmented by the sight of the gown Mathilde was wearing, cut low so as to expose her shoulders, though his reaction was not flattering to his pride. Her beauty is the beauty of youth, he thought. Five or six young men, among them the men Julien had stood beside in the doorway, were between him and her.

“You, Monsieur, you’ve been here in Paris all winter. Is it true that this is the prettiest ball of the season?” He did not reply.

“This Coulon quadrille<sup>63</sup> seems very fine to me, and the ladies danced it perfectly.” The young men all turned around to see what lucky man was the one she was trying to get a response out of. They were not encouraged.

“I couldn’t possibly be a good judge, Mademoiselle; I spend all my time writing. This is the first ball on this level of magnificence that I’ve ever seen.”

The mustached young gentlemen were scandalized.

“You’re a sage, Monsieur Sorel,” she said, her interest clearly piqued. “You look upon all these balls, all these parties, the way a philosopher would, like Jean-Jacques Rousseau. All these follies surprise you, without tempting you.”

“Jean-Jacques Rousseau,” he replied, “was nothing but a fool in my view when he presumed to pass judgment on high society. He didn’t understand it, and he came to the subject with the heart of an upstart lackey.”

“He wrote *The Social Contract*,” Mathilde said, veneration in her voice.

“But while he preached the republic and the overthrow of all monarchical honors, the social climber was positively intoxicated with bliss when a duke changed the direction of his after-dinner walk to accompany one of his friends.”

“Oh yes—the Duc de Luxembourg, at Montmorency, accompanying a Monsieur Coindet on the way to Paris . . . ,”<sup>64</sup> said Mademoiselle de La Mole with the pleasure and the abandon of her very first experience of pedantry. She found her knowledge intoxicating, a little like the academician who discovered the existence of King Feretrius.<sup>65</sup> Julien’s gaze remained penetrating and stern. Mathilde had had a moment of enthusiasm, and the coolness of her partner deeply disconcerted her.<sup>66</sup> This was all the more surprising, considering how, typically, she was the one who produced this effect on others.

Just then, the Marquis de Croisenois was eagerly wending his way through the crowd to get to Mademoiselle de La Mole. He was stuck about three feet away, unable to get through. He looked at her with a smile at the obstacle between them. Near him was the young Marquise de Rouvray, a cousin of Mathilde’s. She was on the arm of her husband, to whom she had been married only two weeks ago. The Marquis de Rouvray, very young also, exuded all that simpleminded love that possesses a man who, having made a marriage of convenience arranged entirely by a legal team, finds himself married to a lovely woman. Monsieur de Rouvray would become a duke someday, upon the death of an aged uncle.

While the Marquis de Croisenois, unable to get through the crowd, looked at Mathilde and laughed, she let her eyes—those grand eyes of a celestial blue—rest upon him and the people near him. Could anything be duller, she thought,

than that whole group? There's Croisenois, who believes he's going to marry me; he's sweet, and polished, and he has perfect manners, just like Monsieur de Rouvray. If it weren't for the boredom they cause me, these gentlemen would be quite pleasant. And he'll take me to balls with that same complacent, satisfied air. A year after our wedding, my carriage, my horses, my gowns, my château twenty leagues from Paris—everything will be just as fine as possible, all of it exactly what any social climber would die for, like the Comtesse de Roiville, for example. And then . . . ?

Mathilde's future already bored her. The Marquis de Croisenois had managed to reach her side, and he was speaking to her, but she continued day-dreaming without listening to him. The sound of his words melded with the general buzzing of the ball. Mechanically, her eye continued to follow Julien, who had taken his leave respectfully but with a proud and discontented air. She saw over in a corner, far from the crowd, Comte Altamira, condemned to death in his own country (as the reader already knows). In the time of Louis XIV, one of his relations had married one of the princes of Conti; that history afforded him some protection now from the police and the Congrégation.

It's only a death sentence that really distinguishes a man, thought Mathilde. It's the only thing nobody tries to buy.

Ah! I've made a clever epigram! Too bad I didn't think of it when I could have used it and enhanced my reputation! Mathilde had too much good taste to use a prefabricated witticism, but she also had too much vanity not to be rather enchanted with herself. A happy expression replaced her bored look. The Marquis de Croisenois, who had been speaking to her the whole time, believed he had made a success, so he doubled his volubility.

Could some prude find any fault with my epigram? Mathilde asked herself. I could reply to my critic: the title of baron, or vicomte, these can be bought. A cross can be given, and in fact my brother just got one, and what has he ever done? A move up, that can be arranged. Ten years with the garrison, or a relative who's the minister of war, and you're made a squadron commander, like Norbert. A great fortune—well, this is the most difficult to obtain, and consequently the most meritorious. Isn't that funny? It's just the opposite of what

all the books say . . . Ah! Well, to get the fortune, you marry the daughter of Monsieur Rothschild.

So really, my little epigram has some depth to it. Being condemned to death is the one thing nobody has ever tried to ask for.

Turning to Monsieur de Croisenois: “Do you know Comte Altamira?”

She suddenly seemed to have been so far away, and her question had so little to do with anything that the poor marquis had been talking about for the last five minutes that his politeness almost deserted him. But he was a clever man, and highly esteemed for that quality.

Mathilde is most unusual, he thought. That’s not such a good thing, but on the other hand, she would confer so splendid a social position on her husband! I don’t know how the Marquis de La Mole does it; he’s close to the best people in all the parties; he’s a man who’ll never be cast out into the darkness. Besides, that oddity of Mathilde’s can pass for a kind of genius. When it’s combined with high birth and a lot of money, genius is not a target for ridicule; instead, it’s even a distinction! Moreover, she’s so good, when she wants to be, at combining wit, character, and perfect timing so as to create the perfect effect . . . But because it is difficult to manage two things at the same time, the marquis replied with a vacant air, as if he were reciting a lesson:

“Who doesn’t know the poor Altamira?” He went on to tell her the story of his foiled, and ridiculous, and absurd conspiracy.

“Yes, very absurd!” said Mathilde, as if speaking to herself. “But still, the man has done something. I want to meet a man; bring him to me,” she said to the shocked marquis.

Comte Altamira was one of the most open admirers of the haughty, almost impertinent ways of Mademoiselle de La Mole; in his view, she was one of the most beautiful creatures in Paris.

“How beautiful she’d look on a throne!” he said to Monsieur de Croisenois, as he let himself be led to her without objection.

There are always plenty of people in society who wish to establish as a fact that there is nothing more in bad taste than a conspiracy; it smells of Jacobinism. And what is uglier than an unsuccessful Jacobin?



Glancing at de Croisenois, Mathilde's expression seemed to be laughing at the liberalism of Altamira, but she listened to him with pleasure.

A conspirator at the ball—what a nice contrast, she thought. To her he seemed, with his black mustache, like a lion in repose; but she soon perceived that his entire soul was taken up with one thing only: *utility, admiration for utility*.

If a thing could not lead to his country's having a two-chamber government, that thing ceased to have any interest for the young count. He turned away with pleasure from Mathilde, the most seductive creature at the ball, because he saw a Peruvian general enter the room.

Despairing of Europe, poor Altamira had been reduced to pinning his hopes on the states of South America; when they became strong and powerful enough, he hoped they might restore the freedom to Europe that Mirabeau had sent to them.<sup>67</sup>

Mathilde was surrounded by a swarm of mustached young men. She had seen quite clearly that Altamira had not been seduced, and she felt stung at his departure; she could see how his black eyes gleamed in talking to the Peruvian general. Mademoiselle de La Mole gazed upon the young Frenchmen with that deep seriousness that none of her rivals could imitate. Which of these, she said to herself, could do something that would lead to his being condemned to death, even given the most favorable conditions?

That intense gaze of hers flattered the less intelligent but disturbed the others. They feared that some explosive witticism, impossible to respond to, might be about to descend upon them.

High birth imparts a hundred qualities to a man, the absence of which would offend me. Take Julien, for example, thought Mathilde. But noble birth also withers those qualities of the soul that might lead to a man's being condemned to death.

Just then someone close by was saying, "The Comte Altamira is the second son of the prince of San Nazaro-Pimentel. It was a Pimentel who tried to save Conradin, beheaded in 1268. They're one of the noblest families in Naples."

There it is, Mathilde said to herself, proof of my maxim, and right on cue:

high birth removes the strength of character required to get oneself condemned to death! Clearly, I'm destined to think mad thoughts tonight. All right—since I'm a woman like any other, it's time I danced. She gave in to the entreaties of the Marquis de Croisenois, who had been trying to get her to dance a *galope* with him for the last hour. To distract herself from her failure in philosophy, Mathilde determined to be consummately enticing; Monsieur de Croisenois was in heaven.

But neither the dance nor the desire to be attractive for one of the handsomest men at court—nothing could distract Mathilde; it would be impossible to have been more of a success. She was the queen of the ball, and she could see it, but it left her cold.

What a flat, dull life I'll be living with a creature like Croisenois, she said to herself, as he escorted her back to her seat an hour later . . . Where will I find any pleasure, she continued with sadness in her heart, if, after being gone for six months, I don't find it here in the midst of a ball that's the envy of every woman in Paris? And on top of that, I'm surrounded by deference and tributes from a social set as splendid as anything I could imagine. The only bourgeois I see here are a few peers and one or two Juliens, maybe. And yet, she added, her sadness deepening, look at the advantages Fate lavished on me—reputation, wealth, youth! Everything, alas, except happiness.

And out of all my advantages, the most dubious are the ones I've been hearing about all evening. Wit—yes, I must really have that, because I obviously terrify everyone. If any of them are brave enough to broach a serious topic with me, after five minutes of conversation they're all out of breath, as if they've just made a great discovery of the very thing I've been telling them for an hour. I'm beautiful—I have that advantage, too, the one trait for which Madame de Staël would have sacrificed everything, and yet the fact is I'm dying of boredom. Is there any reason to think I'll be any less bored once I've changed my name for that of the Marquis de Croisenois?

But good God! she added, feeling close to tears, he's the perfect man, isn't he? The masterpiece, the ultimate outcome of the best upbringing and educa-

tion of our time. As soon as you so much as look at him, he thinks of something pleasant, even witty to say to you. And he's brave . . . But that Sorel is something different, she said to herself, and as she did, the gloom in her eye turned to a gleam of annoyance. I told him I had something to say to him, and he doesn't deign to come back to me.

## 9

# THE BALL

*The gorgeous clothes, the blazing candles, the perfumes:  
So many lovely arms, so many shoulders! The bouquets!  
The Rossini airs enlivening everything, and the sets by Ciceri!  
I'm beside myself!*

### TRAVELS OF USERI<sup>68</sup>

"You're acting moody," the Marquise de La Mole said to her. "I warn you, it's not becoming at a ball."

"It's just a headache," Mathilde replied, disdain in her tone. "It's too hot in here."

And at that very moment, as if to support Mademoiselle de La Mole's claim, the old Baron de Tolly suddenly felt ill and collapsed; he had to be carried out. Everybody called it apoplexy; it was an unpleasant incident.

Mathilde ignored it entirely. She had established a firm principle never to look at old men or anyone known to speak about sad things.

She danced to avoid the conversation about apoplexy—which it wasn't, incidentally, for the baron was back on the scene a couple of days later.

But Monsieur Sorel has still not come, she thought again, after her dance. She was about to start looking for him when she caught sight of him in another

room. Extraordinary thing: he seemed to have dropped his cold, impassive manner that had become so natural to him; he no longer acted like an Englishman.

He's talking with Comte Altamira, my condemned man! Mathilde said to herself. His eyes are fiery and intense. He looks like a prince in disguise; his expression is even loftier.

Julien was making his way toward the spot where she was, still engaged in talking to Altamira; she looked at him fixedly, studying his features to see if he had the grand qualities that could earn a man the honor of being condemned to death.

As he was walking by her:

"Yes," he was saying to the count, "Danton was a man!"<sup>69</sup>

Oh, heavens! Will he turn out to be a Danton? Mathilde thought. But this one has such a noble appearance, and that Danton was so horribly ugly, a butcher, I think. Julien was still close to her, so she did not hesitate to call him: she was conscious of, and proud of, having a question for him that would be an unusual thing coming from a young lady.

"Wasn't Danton a butcher?" she asked him.

"Yes, in the eyes of certain people," Julien replied, his expression one of thinly disguised contempt, and, his eyes still fiery from the conversation with Altamira, he went on: "But unfortunately for people of the nobility, he was a lawyer at Méry-sur-Seine. That is to say, Mademoiselle," he added with an unfriendly tone, "that he started out much the way many of the peers I see here did. Yes, it is true that Danton had the disadvantage, so important in the eyes of the beautiful, of being quite ugly."

These last words were said rapidly, in an exceptionally impolite tone.

Julien stopped for a moment, his upper body bent forward in a slight bow, creating an image of arrogant humility. The pose seemed to say: I am paid to reply to you, and I must live on my pay. He did not deign to raise his eyes and look at Mathilde. She, with those gorgeous eyes opened extraordinarily wide and fixed firmly upon him, looked as if she were his slave. Finally, as the silence continued, he looked at her the way a valet looks at his master, seeking his or-

ders. And even though he continued to stare straight into Mathilde's eyes, which remained strangely fixed upon him, he moved away, stepping rapidly.

Just imagine that man, who's really quite good-looking, Mathilde said to herself after a pause, heaping praise upon ugliness! And he doesn't bother to reflect on himself! He's not like Caylus or Croisenois. This Sorel acts a little like my father does when he imitates Napoleon at a ball. She had entirely forgotten Danton. I'm definitely bored tonight. She took her brother's arm and, to his great annoyance, made him escort her on a walk around the rooms. The idea occurred to her of trying to follow the conversation between the condemned man and Julien.

The crowd was enormous. She did succeed, though, in overtaking the pair at the moment when, just a step or two in front of her, Altamira was reaching toward a tray to get an ice. He was speaking to Julien, half turned toward him. He noticed an arm in a brocaded sleeve reaching for an ice from the same tray. The braid trim seemed to catch his attention; he turned around at once to see the person wearing the sleeve. His eyes—noble, guileless—took on a slight expression of scorn.

"Do you see that man?" he asked Julien quietly. "That's the Prince d'Araceli, the \*\*\* ambassador. This morning he was with your French minister for foreign affairs, Monsieur de Nerval, trying to have me extradited.<sup>70</sup> There, look at him there, playing whist. Monsieur de Nerval is inclined to give me to him, because we gave two or three conspirators back to France in 1816. If they send me back to my king, I'll be hanged within twenty-four hours. And it'll be some one of these handsome mustached gentlemen who'll *snatch* me."<sup>71</sup>

"The dogs!" exclaimed Julien, half aloud.

Mathilde didn't miss a single syllable of their conversation. Her boredom had disappeared.

"Not dogs really," replied Comte Altamira. "I've been speaking about myself just to give you a vivid living example. Look over there at Prince d'Araceli. Every five minutes, he pauses to look down at his Golden Fleece. He just can't get over the pleasure of seeing that ornament pinned to his chest. The poor man, really, is simply an anachronism. A hundred years ago, that Golden Fleece was

a real honor, but back then, it would have been completely out of his reach. Today, among the highborn, it takes an Araceli to be so enchanted by it. He'd have had a whole village hanged to get it."

"Is that what it cost him?" asked Julien anxiously.

"No, not exactly," Altamira replied coldly. "He may have had some thirty rich landowners thrown in the river back in his country, men who had the reputation of being liberals."

"What a monster!" Julien said again.

Mademoiselle de La Mole was leaning forward with such intense interest, and standing so closely to Julien, that her beautiful hair just brushed his shoulder.

"Ah, you're so young!" said Altamira. "I was telling you that I have a married sister in Provence; she's still pretty, good, sweet-natured. She's an excellent mother, sees to all her duties faithfully, and she's religious without being a fanatic."

Where's he going with this? Mademoiselle de La Mole wondered.

"She's happy," Comte Altamira continued, "and she was happy in 1815. That's when I was in hiding at her place, an estate near Antibes. Well, when she got word of the execution of Marshal Ney, she burst into a dance!"<sup>72</sup>

"That's not possible!" exclaimed Julien, horrified.

"Oh yes—it's the spirit of party," replied Altamira. "You see, in our nineteenth century, there are no more real passions; that's why everybody in France is so bored. We commit the greatest cruelties, but without any real cruelty at all."

"All the worse," said Julien. "If we're going to commit a crime, we should at least commit it with some pleasure. That's the only good thing about a crime, the only possible justification for it."

Mademoiselle de La Mole, entirely forgetting her social position and what she owed to herself, had come to stand practically right between Altamira and Julien. Her brother—whose arm she had taken—being accustomed to obeying her, was gazing out across the room and, so as to look less awkward, was pretending to be held up by the crowd.

"You're right," Altamira was saying. "Everything they do is done without

pleasure, and is almost immediately forgotten, even their crimes. I could point out ten men, perhaps, here at this ball who will ultimately be damned as murderers. They've forgotten it, and so has the world.<sup>73</sup>

"You'll see many of these same men moved to tears if their dog injures its paw. At Père-Lachaise, when flowers are strewn upon the graves—as you say so pleasantly here in Paris—they tell us that the deceased united in themselves all the virtues of the knights of yesteryear, and they tell us all about the great feats their ancestors accomplished in the time of Henri IV. If, despite all the good offices of Prince Araceli, I am not hanged and I eventually come into my fortune here in Paris, I'd like to invite you to a dinner to meet nine or ten murderers, all honorable men, and all without remorse.

"At that dinner, you and I will be the only ones without blood on our hands, but I will be despised, practically hated as a bloodthirsty Jacobin monster, while you will only be scorned as a man of the people who forced your way into good company."

"That's so true!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de La Mole.

Altamira, startled, stared at her; Julien didn't deign to look at her.

"Consider," Altamira went on, "that the revolution at the head of which I find myself was a failure, and for only one reason—that I did not want to behead three individuals, and distribute among our partisans the seven or eight million that were in a safe to which I held the key. My king who, today, so earnestly wants to see me hanged, and who, before the revolt called me by the familiar *tu*, would have given me the grand sash of his order if I had cut off those heads and distributed the money from his safes, because I would have at least achieved a partial success, and my country today would have a charter of some kind . . . But that's the way the world is. It's a chess game."

"And then," Julien said, his eyes fiery, "you didn't know the game—but now . . ."

"I'd cut off the heads, you mean, and I wouldn't be the Girondin that you implied I was the other day?<sup>74</sup> . . . I'll answer you," said Altamira, his voice saddening, "when you've killed a man in a duel—which is a great deal less ugly than having him killed by an executioner."

“No, I tell you,” said Julien, “the end justifies the means. If I had any power, and weren’t just one more atom, I’d hang three men in order to save the lives of four.”

His eyes glowed with the fire of an intense contempt for the vain judgments of men; when his eyes turned to meet those of Mademoiselle de La Mole, who was right beside him, far from turning gracious and civil, his look of scorn seemed to double.

This shocked her profoundly, but the ability to forget Julien was no longer in her power; irritated, she withdrew, taking her brother along with her.

I need to have some punch, and then I need to dance a great deal, she said to herself. I’m going to choose the best man here, and have some impact, at any cost. Good—here comes that impertinent Comte de Fervaques. She accepted his invitation, and they danced. Now we’ll have to see, she thought, which of us will be the most impertinent, but if I’m going to ridicule him properly, I need to get him talking. Soon, all the others were dancing only for appearance’s sake. No one wanted to miss a single one of Mathilde’s spicy ripostes. Monsieur de Fervaques started to worry and, producing only elegant phrases without being able to come up with any ideas, he was reduced to making faces. Mathilde was in a real mood now, and she was quite cruel to him, treating him like an enemy. She danced on until dawn, and when she finally went home she was utterly fatigued. But in the carriage, she used the little strength she had left to make herself sad and miserable. She had been scorned by Julien, and she could not scorn him.

Julien’s happiness knew no bounds, for he had been enraptured—without realizing it—by the music, the flowers, the beautiful women, the general elegance, and most of all by his imagination, which was busy building up distinctions for him and liberty for all humankind. “What a fine ball!” he said to the comte. “Nothing is lacking.”

“Well, thought is lacking,” replied Altamira.

His facial expression betrayed that contempt that is even more devastating for the effort the person puts into trying to conceal it.

“But you’re here, Monsieur le Comte. So thought is represented, isn’t it, and conspiracy too?”



"I'm here because of my name. No, they hate thought in your drawing rooms. Thinking must never go any deeper than a witty couplet from a theater song—that's the kind that gets rewarded. But the man who truly thinks, if he has any energy and sense of originality in his conversation, gets called a *cynic* in your country. Isn't that what one of your judges called Courier? You put him in prison, just like Béranger.<sup>75</sup> Anything of any intellectual value in your country gets taken by the Congrégation right to the police, and all the respectable citizens applaud them for it.

"Your society values appearance over everything else . . . You'll never rise higher than military valor; you'll have Murats, but never Washingtons.<sup>76</sup> I look at France and I see nothing but vanity. A man who expresses new ideas will inevitably say something imprudent, and his host takes that as an insult."

As he was saying this, the comte's carriage, which was taking Julien home, came to a stop before the Hôtel de La Mole. Julien was half in love with his conspirator. Altamira had made him a splendid compliment, apparently out of real conviction: "You don't have any of that French superficiality; you understand the principle of *utility*." As it happened, he had seen a performance, just two evenings before, of Casimir Delavigne's tragedy *Marino Faliero*.<sup>77</sup>

Isn't Israel Bertuccio a man of greater character than all those Venetian nobles? our rebel plebeian asked himself. And yet they can trace their nobility all the way back to the year 700, a century before Charlemagne, while the noblest of those at the ball of Monsieur de Retz have pedigrees going back—and only going back in a wobbly way too—as far as the thirteenth century. Well then! Out of all those Venetians of such high birth, the only character who's remembered is Israel Bertuccio.

A political conspiracy wipes out all the titles conferred by society's whims. In a situation like that, a man's rank is commensurate with the kind of death he's willing to risk. Even wit and intellect begin to lose their empire . . .

What would Danton be today, in this century of Valenods and Rênals? Not even deputy prosecutor to the crown . . .

What am I saying? He'd sell out to the Congrégation and he'd be a cabinet minister, because after all, even the great Danton was a thief. Mirabeau sold out too. Napoleon stole millions in Italy, because without those millions he

would have been mired in poverty, just like Pichegru.<sup>78</sup> Lafayette was the only one who didn't steal. Must one steal, and must one sell out? wondered Julien. The question brought him up short. He spent the rest of the night reading the history of the Revolution.

The next day, as he was working on correspondence in the library, he could think of nothing but the conversation with Comte Altamira.

When you think about it, he said to himself after a long reflection, if those Spanish liberals had compromised the people by committing crimes, they wouldn't have been swept aside so easily.<sup>79</sup> They were a batch of big talkers, just children . . . like me! he exclaimed suddenly, as though being startled and waking up from a dream.

What difficult things have I ever done that give me the right judge any poor devils who finally, for once in their lives, dared to begin to act? I'm like the man who gets up from the table, saying, "Tomorrow I'll go without dinner, and it won't stop me from feeling just as strong and lighthearted as I do today." How would I know what it feels to be part of some great action? Because after all, such things are not like just shooting off a pistol.<sup>80</sup> These high thoughts were interrupted by the unexpected appearance of Mademoiselle de La Mole, who now entered the library. He was so wrapped up in his admiration for the great qualities in Danton, Mirabeau, and Carnot, men who managed not to be beaten, that his eyes came to rest on Mademoiselle de La Mole without thinking of her at all, without greeting her, almost without even seeing her. When, finally, his great, wide-open eyes did take in the fact of her presence, the light in them went out. Mademoiselle de La Mole noted this with bitterness.

It was in vain that she asked him to get her a volume of Vély's *History of France*, up on the highest shelf, which obliged Julien to seek out the larger of the two ladders. Julien found the ladder, found the book, and gave it to her, without thinking of her in the slightest degree. As he replaced the ladder, still fully preoccupied, his protruding elbow struck one of the glass panes on a bookshelf; the noise of the glass shattering on the floor finally brought him out of it. He hastened to apologize to Mademoiselle de La Mole; he wanted to be mannerly, but he was only mannerly. Mathilde clearly saw that she had dis-

turbed him, and that he would have much preferred to go on dreaming about whatever he had been dreaming about than to talk to her. After looking at him for a long moment, she slowly left the room. Julien watched her walking. He delighted in the contrast between the simplicity of her clothes and look today, with the magnificent elegance of the night before. The difference even in her face was striking. This girl, so haughty at the ball at the Duc de Retz's, looked almost suppliant now. Really, Julien thought, that black gown sets off the beauty of her figure better. She has the bearing of a queen, but why is she in mourning?

If I ask someone about it, I'll only be committing another faux pas. Julien had fully recovered from his rapturous daydreaming. I need to go back over all the letters I've written today. God knows how many misspellings and blunders I'll find. As he picked up and began reading the first letter with full concentration, he heard the rustle of a silk gown quite close to him; he turned around rapidly. Mademoiselle de La Mole was standing two feet from his desk, laughing. This second interruption annoyed Julien.

As for Mathilde, she had just come to the vivid realization that she meant nothing to this young man; her laugh was meant to conceal her embarrassment, and it succeeded.

"Apparently you've got your mind on something terribly interesting, Monsieur Sorel. Could it be some curious anecdote about the conspiracy that sent Comte Altamira to us here in Paris? Tell me what it is; I'm dying to know. I'll be discreet, I swear." She was astonished to hear herself saying this. What—was she really standing here pleading with a subordinate? Her embarrassment worsened, so she added, in a light, flippant tone:

"What can it be that's turned you, normally so cold, into an inspired creature, a kind of Michelangelo prophet?"

This harsh, bold interrogation wounded Julien deeply, and brought back all his rage.

"Was Danton right to steal?" he asked her brusquely, with an air that became increasingly fierce. "The Piedmont revolutionaries, or the Spanish ones—should they have compromised their people by committing crimes? Give

away to men who don't merit it all the leadership positions in the army, all the military decorations? And the people who wore those crosses, wouldn't they have good reason to fear the return of their king? Should they have let the Turin treasury be looted? In short, Mademoiselle," he said, approaching her with a ferocious look, "the man who wants to rid the world of ignorance and crime, should he pass through like a tempest and commit whatever crime happens to present itself?"

Mathilde felt afraid, and she could not meet his gaze; she stepped back a couple of paces. She looked at him briefly—and then, with a light step, left the library.

## 10

# QUEEN MARGUERITE

*Love! What madness will you not employ*

*To put us on the trail of pleasure?*

**LETTERS OF A PORTUGUESE NUN**<sup>81</sup>

Julien turned back to rereading his letters. When the bell for dinner sounded: How ridiculous I must have seemed to that Parisian doll, he thought, and what madness to tell her what I actually had been thinking! But maybe it wasn't all that mad. Telling the truth at that moment was an act worthy of me.

But why did she come and interrogate me on my private thoughts? The question was indiscreet on her part. It was impolite. My thoughts on Danton are not part of the job her father pays me to do.

When he got to the dining room, he was distracted from his bad temper by the full mourning dress of Mademoiselle de La Mole, which was even more striking when he saw that no one else was in black.

After dinner, he found himself fully recovered from the fit of zeal that had obsessed him all morning. Fortunately, the academician who knew Latin was

present at the dinner. This is the man who'll scorn me the least, thought Julien, if my question about the mourning of Mademoiselle de La Mole is a social blunder.

Mathilde was gazing at him with an unusual expression. There you have it, the coquetry of women around here, just as Madame de Rênal described it, Julien said to himself. I was not pleasant this morning, and I did not give in to whatever whim of hers made her want to chat. And as a result, I stand higher in her estimation. No doubt there'll be the devil to pay later. That arrogant contempt of hers will lead her to some kind of vengeance. Let her do her worst. But what a difference from the woman I've lost! What natural charm, what simplicity! I knew her thoughts before she spoke them, I could see them being born. My only adversary in her heart was the fear she felt about her children dying, and that's a natural, rational, even lovable feeling, even though I suffered for it. I was a fool. The ideas I'd got in my head about Paris kept me from appreciating that sublime woman.

And great God, the difference here! Here, all I see are a dry, haughty vanity, all the shades of self-love—and nothing else.

They were getting up from the table. I can't let my academician be button-holed by somebody else, Julien thought. He approached the man as they were passing through the garden, took on a sweet, submissive air, and agreed with him in his fury at the success of *Hernani*.<sup>82</sup>

"Ah, if only we could bring back the *lettres de cachet*!" he said.<sup>83</sup>

"Yes—if we still had those, he would never have dared," cried the academician, making a gesture worthy of Talma.<sup>84</sup>

Noticing a flower growing nearby, Julien quoted some lines from Virgil's *Georgics*, going on to note that nothing could surpass the verse of the abbé De-lille.<sup>85</sup> In short, he flattered the academician in every way possible. After which, he assumed an indifferent air, saying, "I suppose Mademoiselle de La Mole must have come into some bequest from an uncle, for whom she's wearing mourning."

"What? You live here in the house," said the academician, stopping short, "and you don't know about her mania? It's really strange that her mother lets

her do these things. But just between you and me, the people in this house don't exactly shine when it comes to strength of character. Mademoiselle Mathilde has enough for all of them. Today's the thirtieth of April!" With that, the academician stopped and gave Julien a shrewd look. Julien smiled and tried to look as intelligent as he could.

What possible connection could there be between dominating an entire household and wearing a black gown on April 30? he asked himself. I must be even denser than I thought I was.

"I must admit . . ." he said to the academician, an inquiring look in his eye. "Let's take a turn in the garden," said the academician, delighted at the prospect of delivering a lengthy, stylish narrative.

"What? Is it possible you don't know what happened on the thirtieth of April 1574?"

"Where?" asked Julien, surprised.

"The place de Grève."

Julien was so astonished that this failed to clarify anything for him. But his curiosity, his evident expectation of hearing about some tragedy, so natural to him, made his eyes shine with the glow that any storyteller loves to see in the eyes of the listener. The academician, thrilled at having discovered a virgin ear, took his time telling Julien how, on April 30, 1574, the finest young man of the century, Boniface de La Mole, and his friend, the Piedmontese gentleman Anibal de Coconasso, came to be beheaded on the place de Grève. "La Mole was the adored lover of Queen Marguerite de Navarre,<sup>86</sup> and do note," interjected the academician, "that Mademoiselle de La Mole is named *Mathilde Marguerite*. La Mole was at the same time both the favorite of the Duc d'Alençon and an intimate friend of his mistress's husband, the king of Navarre, later King Henri IV. On Shrove Tuesday of that year, 1574, the royal court was in Saint-Germain along with the poor King Charles IX, who was dying. La Mole wanted to free the princes, his friends, who were kept prisoners in the court on the orders of Catherine de Medici. He led two hundred horsemen up to the walls of Saint-Germain, but the Duc d'Alençon lost his nerve, and La Mole was thrown to the executioner.

“But the thing that so moves Mademoiselle Mathilde, and she told me this herself, seven or eight years ago, when she was about twelve, because that girl has determination, oh, what determination!” And with that, the academician raised his eyes to the heavens. “What moves her about this political catastrophe is that Queen Marguerite de Navarre, who stood concealed in a house looking onto the place de Grève, dared to ask the executioner for the head of her lover. And the next night, at midnight, she took the head into her carriage and went off to bury it herself in a chapel at the foot of Montmartre.”

“Is it possible?” cried Julien, deeply moved.

“Mademoiselle Mathilde scorns her brother because, as you see, he doesn’t care at all about all this ancient history and is not about to wear mourning on April thirtieth. Ever since that famous execution, to commemorate the close friendship between La Mole and Coconasso—who, like the Italian he was, was named Annibal—all the men in the family are given that name. And,” the academician went on, lowering his voice, “that Coconasso was, according to Charles IX himself, one of the cruelest of the murderers of August 24, 1572 . . .<sup>87</sup> But my dear Sorel, how is it possible that you, who sit at the dining table in this house every day, don’t know all this?”

“So this is why, two different times at dinner today, Mademoiselle de La Mole called her brother Annibal. I thought I must be mishearing.”

“It was a reproach. It’s strange that the marquise puts up with this whim of hers . . . The husband of that grand girl is going to have some surprises!”

This was followed by five or six satiric remarks. The joy, and the intimacy, that sparkled in the academician’s eyes shocked Julien. We’re just like two domestics, talking behind our masters’ backs, he thought. But nothing would surprise me from this academy man.

One day, Julien had come upon him kneeling at the feet of the Marquise de La Mole: he was asking her for the grant of a tobacco license for a nephew in the country. That evening, a little chambermaid of Mademoiselle de La Mole, who had set her sights on Julien just as Élisabeth had done, told him that her mistress’s mourning was not an affectation or a means to attract attention. This eccentricity sprang from the depths of her character. She truly loved that La

Mole, the beloved lover of the most brilliant queen of her century, a man who died for having tried to achieve liberty for his friends. And what friends! The First Prince of the Blood and Henri IV.

Having been accustomed to the perfect naturalness in everything Madame de Rênal did, Julien saw only affectation in all the women of Paris; and if he felt so much as slightly melancholic, he could find nothing to say to them. Mademoiselle de La Mole was the exception.

He began by no longer interpreting the kind of beauty that accompanies a noble bearing as coldheartedness. He had long conversations with Mademoiselle de La Mole, who sometimes after dinner would stroll in the garden with him, outside the opened windows of the dining room. She told him one day that she was reading the *History* of d'Aubigné and Brantôme.<sup>88</sup> A rare kind of reader, thought Julien; and the marquise would not even permit her to read the novels of Walter Scott!

One day she told him, her eyes agleam with pleasure, proving the sincerity of her feeling, about a young woman in the era of Henri III, a story she had just read in the *Memoirs* of l'Étoile: when she found her husband had been unfaithful, she stabbed him.<sup>89</sup>

Julien's self-esteem was flattered. A person commanding such respect, one who, in the words of the academician, dominated the whole household, deigned to converse with him in a tone that could almost be called friendly.

No, that's not it, Julien soon thought. It's not real familiarity—I'm just someone she can tell a tragic story to, when she feels like talking. I pass for a learned person in this family. I'll go read Brantôme, d'Aubigné, l'Étoile. I'll be able to challenge some of the anecdotes Mademoiselle de La Mole tells me. I want to get out of this role of the passive listener.

Bit by bit, his conversations with the young lady, who was both very imposing and very easygoing, became more interesting. He forgot to play his tedious role as the plebeian rebel. He found her learned, quite rational. The opinions she expressed in the garden were different from those she expressed in the drawing room. Sometimes with him she showed an enthusiasm and a frankness



that formed a perfect contrast with her usual way of behaving, so haughty and so cold.

“The Wars of the League<sup>90</sup> were the heroic age for France,” she was saying to him one day, her eyes sparkling with intellect and enthusiasm. “In those days, everyone fought for a particular, desired goal, to aid in the triumph of their own party, and not just to obtain some pointless cross, as they did in the day of your emperor. You have to agree that there was less egoism then, and less pettiness. I love that century.”

“And Boniface de La Mole was its hero,” he said.

“Well, in any case he was loved in a way that it might be sweet to be loved. What woman alive today wouldn’t just collapse in horror at touching the decapitated head of her beloved?”

Madame de La Mole called her daughter. If hypocrisy is going to be useful, it must remain hidden; and Julien, as we’ve seen, had made a kind of half avowal of his admiration for Napoleon.

And there’s the great advantage they have over us, Julien said to himself, remaining alone in the garden. The history of their ancestors raises them up above vulgar concerns, and they no longer have to worry about how to feed themselves! Oh, how wretched it is! he added bitterly; I’m not worthy to converse on these great matters. My life has been nothing but a string of hypocrisies, and all because I don’t have an income of a thousand francs to buy my bread with.

“What are you dreaming about, Monsieur?” Mathilde asked as she hurried back to him. There was a certain intimacy in the question, and she had come running back, out of breath in her eagerness to return to him.<sup>91</sup>

Julien was tired of feeling disgusted with himself. Out of pride, he told her candidly what he had been thinking. He blushed deeply as he spoke about his poverty to a person so rich. In his pride, he sought the most emphatic way to insist that he was not asking for anything. He had never seemed quite so handsome to Mathilde: she saw a sensibility and an openness in him now that he usually lacked.

Less than a month after this, Julien was walking pensively in the garden of the Hôtel de La Mole, but his face was no longer that of the stern, arrogant philosopher, the face his constant sense of his own inferiority had given him. He had just escorted Mademoiselle de La Mole to the door of the drawing room, after she claimed that she had hurt her foot in running with her brother.

She leaned on my arm in the most extraordinary way! Julien was saying to himself. Am I being a fool, or does she actually feel some liking for me? When she listens to me, she takes on such a sweet, gentle look, even when I'm confessing to her all the suffering my pride has caused me! And this is the woman who has such a haughty way with everybody else. The drawing room guests would be in for a shock if they ever saw that expression on her face. Yes, she definitely acts in that gentle, kind way only with me.

Julien tried not to exaggerate this unusual friendliness. He even tried thinking of it in terms of a kind of negotiation over a treaty. Each day when they met up, before resuming the almost intimate tone from the day before, they seemed to ask themselves: will we be friends today, or enemies? Julien knew that if he allowed this haughty girl to insult him with impunity, everything would be over. If I'm going to quarrel with her, wouldn't it be better to get to it right away, and defend all the legitimate rights of my pride, rather than have to fend off the signs of scorn that would immediately follow the least surrender of what my personal dignity demands?

A number of times when they were in bad humor, Mathilde would try to assume the tone of the great lady with him; she showed a great deal of skill in these attempts, but Julien brushed them off rudely.

One day, he interrupted her brusquely: "Does Mademoiselle de La Mole have any orders for her father's secretary?" he said. "He is required to listen to her commands and to carry them out respectfully, but beyond that, he has nothing whatever to say to her. He is assuredly not being paid to communicate his private thoughts to her."

Julien's behaving like this, and feeling the strange suspicions that he was having, drove away all the boredom he had been feeling in that drawing room,

where, for all its splendor, people were afraid of everything, and no one dared joke about anything.

How funny if she turned out to love me! But love me or not, Julien continued, I have, as an intimate confidante, a brilliant girl, before whom I see the whole house tremble, the Marquis de Croisenois more than most. That young man—so polite, so gentle, so brave, uniting in himself all the advantages birth and fortune can provide, just one of which would be enough to finally put my heart at ease! He's madly in love with her—at least insofar as a Parisian can be in love—and he's going to marry her. How many letters has Monsieur de La Mole had me write to the two notaries arranging the contract! And then I picture myself, the subaltern with pen in hand, coming two hours later into this garden and triumphing over that so amiable young man, because her preference for me is very striking, very clear. It could be, too, that she hates the future husband in him. She's arrogant enough for that. And all the kindnesses she shows to me are earned, in my capacity as the subaltern confidant!

But no: either I'm going mad, or she's making advances to me; the cooler and more distant I am with her, the more she seeks me out. It might be some kind of agenda, or an affectation; but I can see her eyes light up when I show up unexpectedly. Parisian women know how to deceive with this sort of thing, don't they? Well, what's the difference? That's the way it seems, so let's enjoy the appearances. My God, she's beautiful! I adore those great blue eyes, especially seen from up close, and looking at me the way they do sometimes! And what a difference between this spring and last year's, when I was living in misery, supporting myself by sheer force of will, in the midst of those three hundred vile, dirty hypocrites! I was becoming almost as vile as they.

But then there were the less confident days: This girl is laughing at me, Julien thought. She's in league with her brother to keep me mystified. But she seems to despise the way that brother of hers seems to lack any energy! "He's brave—and that's all," she once told me. "He was brave when it was a matter of facing the swords of the Spaniards, but in Paris everything frightens him. His worst fear is being ridiculed."<sup>92</sup> He never has a thought that dares to depart from

the mode of the day. I'm the one who has to constantly come to his defense." A girl of nineteen! At that age, could she faithfully maintain, every single day, the degree of hypocrisy it would take?

On the other hand, when Mademoiselle de La Mole fixes those big blue eyes of hers on me with that certain, unique expression, Comte Norbert moves away, every time. That's suspicious, I think. Shouldn't he feel indignation when he sees his sister singling out some *domestic* in the household? And I've heard the Duc de Chaulnes call me that. That memory now crowded out every other feeling. Is it just that the fussy old duke likes to use old-fashioned language?

Well, she's certainly pretty! Julien continued, glaring around him like a tiger. I'll have her, and then afterward I'll leave, and nobody had better try to get in my way when I do.

This idea became Julien's sole focus; he couldn't think of anything else. His days sped by like hours.

Throughout the day, seeking some serious business to occupy his thoughts, he would drift off and then come to himself abruptly half an hour later, his heart throbbing and his mind flustered, always returning to the one thought: does she love me?

## 11

# A YOUNG WOMAN'S EMPIRE!

*I admire her beauty, but I fear her mind.*

MÉRIMÉE<sup>93</sup>

If Julien had spent as much time examining what was going on in the drawing room as he did exaggerating the beauty of Mathilde, or making himself furious at her family's natural haughtiness (that same family she ignored to be with

him), he would have understood what constituted her imperial power over the people around her. Ah, if I could be her lover, and be more than just this black-suited secretary!<sup>94</sup> Whenever anyone displeased Mademoiselle de La Mole, she knew how to punish the offender by a witticism so perfectly calibrated, so well chosen, so apparently pleasant, and so skillfully launched that the wound grew deeper and deeper the longer you thought about it. Eventually, she had become deadly for anyone with a vulnerable sense of self-esteem. Because she attached no importance to many of the things the rest of the family genuinely desired, they always saw her as being coldhearted. An aristocratic salon is a fine source for witty sayings to quote once you've left the place, but that's all. Complete insignificance, and above all the *common* phrases that underlie and support even hypocrisy, end up annoying us with their nauseating sweetness.<sup>95</sup> And all the politeness ceases to impress after the early days. Julien felt it, after the first enchantment, the first astonishment. Politeness, he said to himself, is only the absence of the anger that bad manners would arouse. Mathilde was often bored, and perhaps she would have been bored anywhere. So honing a witticism was a distraction for her, and a true pleasure.

It was perhaps to have victims a little more amusing than her family, the academicians, and the five or six underlings who were forever paying court to her that she had given grounds for hope to the Marquis de Croisenois, the Comte de Caylus, and two or three other young men of the first rank. But they were nothing to her but new targets for her epigrams.

We admit, though with sorrow, because we like Mathilde, that she had received letters from several of them, and that she had occasionally replied. We hasten to add that this young lady is an exception to the manners of our era. For generally speaking, no one accuses the students of the noble convent of the Sacred Heart of imprudent behavior.

One day the Marquis de Croisenois returned to Mathilde a rather compromising letter she had written to him the day before. He believed that such an act of the highest sensitivity would advance him in her estimation. But what Mathilde liked in her correspondence was precisely imprudence. She loved to tempt fate. She didn't speak to him for the next six weeks.

She amused herself with the letters from these young men, but she began to think they were all just alike. It was always the deepest passion, the darkest melancholy.

“They’re all the same perfect man, all ready to saddle up for Palestine,” she said to her cousin. “Have you ever heard of anything more insipid? And these are the letters I can expect to get throughout my whole life! The letters only change every twenty years, when some new occupation is in style. They must have been less colorless during the days of the Empire. Then all the young men in high society had seen or done things that *really* had some greatness about them. My uncle, the Duc de N\*\*\*, was at Wagram.”<sup>96</sup>

“How much intelligence does it take to hit somebody with a saber? And once they’ve done it, how they keep on talking about it!” said Mathilde’s cousin, Mademoiselle de Sainte-Hérédité.

“Well, I enjoy those stories. To be in a *real* battle, one of Napoleon’s, where ten thousand soldiers were killed—that’s some proof of courage. Exposing yourself to danger elevates the soul and liberates it from the boredom in which all my poor admirers seem to be plunged, and that boredom is contagious. Which of them would ever think about doing something out of the ordinary? They’re all seeking my hand—what a grand enterprise that is! I’m rich, and my father will help his son-in-law get ahead. Oh, if only he could find me one who was even a little amusing!”

Mathilde’s vigorous, clear, picturesque way of seeing things left its mark on her speech, as we see. Often, the way she said something was perceived as a blemish in the eyes of her so-polite friends. They would almost have said, if she hadn’t been quite so much in fashion, that her language was a little too colorful for feminine delicacy.

For her part, she was most unjust to the handsome cavaliers who populate the Bois de Boulogne. It would be wrong to say she viewed the future with terror—that word is too strong—but she did view it with a disgust very rare for someone her age.

What could she possibly want? Wealth, noble birth, intellect, beauty

(which everyone said, and she believed)—all had been lavished upon her by the hand of fate.

Such were the thoughts passing through the mind of the most envied heiress of the Faubourg Saint-Germain when she began finding pleasure in taking walks with Julien. She was startled to see his pride, and she admired the cunning of the little bourgeois. He'll get himself made a bishop, like the abbé Maury, she said to herself.<sup>97</sup>

Soon the sincere, unfeigned resistance that our hero put up to several of her ideas began to intrigue her; she told her friend all the tiniest details of their conversations, but found that she could never describe them well enough to give the whole, rich picture.

Then she had a sudden illumination: I have the good fortune to be in love! she said to herself with an incredible transport of joy. I'm in love, I'm in love—there's no doubt about it! At my age, a girl who's young, beautiful, clever—where is she going to find strong feelings if not in love? I have to give up: I'll never feel love for Croisenois, Caylus, and *tutti quanti*. They're perfect, true, but too perfect, and they simply bore me.

She reviewed mentally all the descriptions of passion she had read in *Manon Lescaut*, *La nouvelle Héloïse*, the *Letters from a Portuguese Nun*, etc., etc. She would have had no interest, of course, in anything other than a grand passion; a light, gentle love would be unworthy of a girl of her age and birth. She would only grant the name of love to the heroic sentiment one finds in France in the days of Henri III and Bassompierre.<sup>98</sup> Such love never made a cowardly surrender when faced with obstacle; far from it: love like that gave birth to great deeds. What bad luck that I wasn't born when there was a real court, like those of Catherine de Medici or Louis XIII! I feel I'd be up to the boldest and the grandest acts. What couldn't I do if I had a courageous king like Louis XIII sighing at my feet! I'd take him into the Vendée,<sup>99</sup> as the Baron de Tolly often puts it, and there he'd reconquer his kingdom. And there would be no more Charter . . . and Julien would be my helper. What does he lack? A name and wealth. He'd make a name for himself, and he'd acquire his fortune.

Croisenois, on the other hand, lacks nothing, but he'll spend his entire life being half-Ultra, half-Liberal, an indecisive creature always avoiding the extremes, and as a result, *coming in second in anything he does*.

And what great action isn't *extreme* at the moment it's undertaken? Ordinary people only see it as possible when it's already been accomplished. Yes, it's going to be love, love with all its miracles, that will reign in my heart; I feel it in this fire that's burning inside me. Heaven owed this favor to me. It won't be in vain that all these advantages have been heaped upon a single person. My happiness will be worthy of myself. I won't let each of my days become a cold replica of the day before. There's already a grandeur, and an audacity, in daring to love a man whose social position is so far below mine. Let's see: will he continue to be worthy of me? At the first weakness I see in him, I'll drop him. A girl of my birth, and with the chivalric character that so many people see in me (my father calls it that), must not conduct herself like a fool.

Isn't that the very role I'd play if I loved the Marquis de Croisenois? I'd simply be repeating the happiness I see in my cousins, which I detest so completely. I know in advance everything the poor marquis would say to me, and everything I'd say back to him. What good's a love that makes you yawn? Might as well turn pious. I'd have a party for the marriage contract signing, like the one my youngest cousin had, with all the family there and getting all sentimental—that is, if they weren't in a rage because of some last-minute clause that the other party's notary slipped in.



## WILL HE BE A DANTON?

*Having a need to be anxious: such was the nature of the beautiful Marguerite de Valois, my aunt, who married the king of Navarre, now reigning in France under the name of Henri IV. The need to gamble was the key to the character of this amiable princess; from this sprang her quarrels and her reconciliations, beginning with her brothers at the age of sixteen. What can a young lady gamble with? Her most precious possession: her reputation, the foundation of her entire life.*

### MEMOIRS OF THE DUC D'ANGOULÊME<sup>100</sup>

Julien and I do not need to sign any contract, nor do we need any lawyers. Everything is heroic, everything will be born of chance. Apart from noble status, which he lacks, it's just like the love of Marguerite de Valois for the young La Mole, the most distinguished man of his time. Is it my fault if the young men of the court today are such great supporters of the *conventional*, and go pale at the very idea of even the slightest unusual adventure? A short trip to Greece or Africa<sup>101</sup> is the very peak of boldness in their eyes, and even then they have to go surrounded by a group. As soon as they have to be alone, they become fearful—not of Bedouin spears, but of ridicule, and that fear drives them mad.

My little Julien, on the other hand, only likes acting alone. That privileged creature never had the slightest temptation to seek out support and help from others! He despises other people, and that is why I do not despise him.

If, considering his poverty, Julien had been noble, my love would be nothing but vulgar foolishness, a tedious mismatch; I wouldn't want any part of it. There would be nothing about it of what characterizes the grand passions: the enormousness of the difficulty to be overcome, and the dark uncertainty of the outcome.

Mademoiselle de La Mole was so absorbed in working out these splendid

arguments that the next day, without realizing it, she praised Julien to the Marquis de Croisenois and her brother. She grew so eloquent on the subject that they became irritated.

“Be careful around that young man, with all that energy of his,” her brother exclaimed. “If the revolution starts up again, he’ll have us all guillotined.”

She refrained from responding, instead hastening to joke with her brother and the Marquis de Croisenois about how energy seemed to frighten them. It was nothing more than the fear of encountering the unexpected, or the fear of being caught short in the presence of the unexpected . . .

“Always the same, gentlemen, always the fear of ridicule, but that monster, alas, died in 1816.”

“There is no ridicule,” Monsieur de La Mole used to say, “in a country with two parties.”<sup>102</sup>

His daughter had understood what he meant.

“And so, Messieurs,” she said to Julien’s enemies, “you’ll live in fear all your lives, and afterward, they’ll say to you:

*“It wasn’t a wolf—just its shadow.”*”<sup>103</sup>

Mathilde left them soon after. What her brother had said filled her with horror. It bothered her a great deal, but the next day, she saw in it the finest kind of praise.

In this century, where energy has died out, his energy frightens them. I’ll tell him what my brother said; I want to see what his response will be. But I’ll choose one of those moments when his eyes are fiery. Then he won’t be able to lie to me.

He’ll become a Danton! she added, after a long, vague reverie. Well, if the revolution did break out again, what roles would Croisenois and my brother play? It’s all scripted in advance: sublime resignation. They’d play heroic sheep, letting their throats be slit without uttering a word. Their only fear in dying would be that they might do something in bad taste. My little Julien would blow out the brains of the Jacobin who came to take him away, if there was any chance of escaping. He’s not afraid of bad taste—not that one.

This last sentiment left her pensive; it brought back painful memories, and

they stripped away all her courage. It reminded her of witticisms from Messieurs de Caylus, de Croisenois, de Luz, and her brother. They all mocked the *priestly* air about Julien—that hypocritical humility in him.

But, she thought suddenly, her eye sparkling with joy, that bitterness and the frequency of their jokes both prove that, whatever they might say, he is the most distinguished man we've seen this winter. He has some weaknesses, some absurdities: what does that matter? He has a greatness about him, and though they're usually so kind and indulgent, it shocks them. Yes, he's poor, and yes, he's studied to become a priest. They're squadron commanders, and you don't need to study for that. They've got it easier.

Despite the disadvantages of that eternal black suit and that priestly facial expression, which the poor boy has to wear if he doesn't want to die of hunger, his merit frightens them. It couldn't be clearer. And that priestly expression: he discards it whenever we've been alone together for a moment or two. Also, whenever those gentlemen manage to say something lively and unexpected, don't they always glance at Julien first? I've seen them do it, often. And yet they know he never speaks to them unless they ask him a question. I'm the only one he speaks to; he thinks I have a superior mind. He responds to their objections only as far as politeness requires. He becomes deferential immediately. But with me, he converses for hours, and he won't be sure of his ideas if I offer even the slightest objection. Anyway, there've been no duels all winter; talking is the only way to get attention. And my father, a superior man who will ensure that the fortunes of our family thrive—he respects Julien. Everyone else hates him, but no one scorns him, except my mother's pious friends.

The Comte de Caylus had, or pretended to have, a great enthusiasm for horses. He spent all his time in the stables, even eating his lunch there. That grand passion, together with his habit of never allowing himself to laugh, earned him the greatest respect from his friends; he was the leading spirit of their circle.

As soon as that circle had gathered together behind the wing chair of Madame de La Mole, with Julien absent, Monsieur de Caylus, supported by Croisenois and Norbert, launched a vigorous attack on Mathilde's good opin-

ion of Julien, and he did so at once, practically the moment he caught sight of Mademoiselle de La Mole. She could see the stratagem a mile away, and it amused her.

Look at them all in league together, she said to herself, against a man of genius who has an income of less than ten louis, and who can only speak when he's directly questioned. They're all afraid of his black suit. What would they do if he wore epaulettes?

Never had she been quite so brilliant. At the very first attacks, she heaped amusing sarcasm on Caylus and his allies. And when the fires of these splendid officers had burned down:

"If tomorrow, some yokel from the Franche-Comté mountains discovers that Julien is his natural son, and gives him a name and a few thousand francs, in six weeks he'll have mustaches like yours, Messieurs, and in six months he'll be an officer in the Hussars like you, Messieurs. And then the greatness in his character will be no laughing matter. But at that point I suppose you'll be reduced to the old, worthless argument: the superiority of the court nobility to the provincial nobility. But what would you do if I pushed you a little further and was malicious enough to give Julien a Spanish duke for his father, a prisoner of war in Besançon during the time of Napoleon, who now, on his deathbed experiences a crisis of conscience and acknowledges him?" All these references to illegitimate birth struck both de Caylus and de Croisenois as in bad taste. That was all they heard in Mathilde's arguments.

Dominated by his sister as Norbert was, what she was saying was so clear to him that he took on a very solemn tone, which, it must be confessed, did not sit at all well with his usual smiling, cheerful demeanor. He ventured to say a few words.

"Are you not feeling well, my dear?" Mathilde asked him, in a mock-serious tone. "You must be feeling ill, if you reply to my little jokes with a sermon.

"A sermon, from you! Are you trying to get appointed prefect somewhere?"

Mathilde soon forgot the irritation of the Comte de Caylus, Norbert's bad temper, and the silent despair of Monsieur de Croisenois. She had to make up her mind about a frightful idea that had just taken possession of her.

Julien is sincere enough with me, she said to herself; at his age, with an inferior fortune, and unhappy as he is with that enormous ambition, he needs a woman friend. I can, perhaps, be that friend, but I don't see any signs of love in him. He's such a bold person—by now he should have said something about love.

This uncertainty, this inner debate from now on totally occupied Mathilde. It started up all over again every time Julien spoke to her, chasing away those little moments of boredom she was so accustomed to having.

The daughter of an intelligent man who could one day be named a minister, and perhaps restore their forests to the clergy,<sup>104</sup> Mademoiselle de La Mole had been, at the Sacred Heart convent school, the object of the most excessive flattery. There is no remedy for such a misfortune. She had been persuaded that, because of all her advantages of birth, fortune, etc., she ought to be happier than anyone else. This is the source of the boredom of princes, and of all the follies they undertake.

Mathilde had by no means escaped the baneful influence of such an idea. No matter how intelligent one is, at ten years old she can hardly be expected to be on her guard against the flattery of an entire convent, especially when the flattery seems to be so well founded.

From the moment she decided she was in love with Julien, she was no longer bored. She congratulated herself every day on having chosen to indulge in a grand passion. This little amusement carries plenty of danger along with it, she told herself. So much the better! A thousand times better!

Before this grand passion, I was languishing in boredom during the best years of my life, from sixteen to twenty. I've already lost those years, with no pleasures apart from listening to my mother's friends talking pious nonsense—women who, back in Koblenz in 1792, were probably not as strict in their morals as their speeches are today.<sup>105</sup>

It was while Mathilde was absorbed in all these uncertainties that Julien was puzzled by the way she would gaze at him fixedly and at length. He could not miss a renewed coldness in the way Comte Norbert treated him, as well as a heightened aloofness on the parts of Messieurs de Caylus, de Luz, and de

Croisenois. But he was used to that kind of thing. It was at its worst toward the end of the evenings in which he had especially shone—more than a man in his position should have. If it weren't for the warm welcome Mathilde showed him, and the curiosity that the whole scene inspired in him, he would have avoided following those splendid young men with their mustaches into the garden, when they accompanied Mademoiselle de La Mole out there after dinner.

Yes, I can't pretend I don't see it, Julien thought: Mademoiselle de La Mole is definitely looking at me in an unusual way. But even when those fine blue eyes are fixed on me with total abandon, I can still see a kind of interrogation in them, a kind of coldness, even a kind of cruelty. Could this possibly be a woman in love? What a difference between the way she looks at me and the way Madame de Rênal did!

One evening after dinner, Julien, who had gone with Monsieur de La Mole into his study, was coming rapidly back out to the garden. As he approached, without taking any precautions, the group standing with Mathilde, he could clearly hear a few words being said in a loud voice. She was needling her brother. Julien distinctly heard his name mentioned twice. He appeared; a total silence fell over the group, though a couple of vain efforts were made to break it. Mademoiselle de La Mole and her brother were too wound up to find any other topic of conversation. Messieurs de Caylus, de Croisenois, de Luz, and another of their friends all treated Julien with icy coldness. He turned and left.

## 13

# A PLOT

*Disconnected remarks, chance encounters can turn into perfectly clear proofs in the eyes of the man of imagination, if he has any spirit.*

SCHILLER<sup>106</sup>

The next day he again happened upon Norbert and his sister while they were discussing him. Upon his arrival, a deadly silence fell, just like the night before. His suspicions knew no bounds. Are these pleasant young people plotting to make a fool of me? I have to admit, that's a lot more likely, and a lot more natural, than this phony passion of Mademoiselle de La Mole is supposed to have for a poor devil of a secretary. Anyway, do these people even have any passions? Keeping you guessing is what they're good at. They're jealous of my little superiority when it comes to language. Being jealous, now that's another one of their weaknesses. I can see the whole picture now. Mademoiselle de La Mole wants to convince me that she's chosen me, simply to offer me up as an entertainment for her intended.

That cruel suspicion altered Julien's entire way of thinking. There had been a small seed of love within his heart, but this suspicion quickly trampled it to death. That love had been based solely upon the rare beauty of Mathilde, or rather on her regal ways and her splendid gowns. In this respect, Julien was still a social climber. A pretty woman from the highest ranks of society is, assuredly, the one thing guaranteed to stun the intelligent peasant when he first begins to frequent the upper classes. In any case, it was certainly not Mathilde's character that had put Julien into a state of reverie in recent days. He had enough sense to realize that he knew nothing about her character. Everything he'd seen of it might have been nothing but show.

For example, Mathilde would not have missed a Sunday Mass for all the world, and she went practically every day of the week with her mother. If, in the drawing room of the Hôtel de La Mole, some guest imprudently forgot for a moment where he was and let himself make some allusion, even the remotest, to some jest that did not align with the real or supposed interests of the Throne or the Altar, Mathilde instantly turned cold and severe. Her expression, piercing enough at the best of times, now took on all the lofty dignity of an old family portrait.

But Julien knew very well that she always had one or two of Voltaire's most philosophical works in her bedroom. He himself often made off with one or

another volume from that magnificently bound set. When he took one volume off the shelf, he arranged the others to camouflage its being missing; but soon he realized that someone else was reading Voltaire. So he made use of a subterfuge he'd used at the seminary: putting a few thin strands of horsehair on the volumes that he thought might interest Mademoiselle de La Mole. The strands would disappear for weeks at a time.

Monsieur de La Mole, growing annoyed with his bookseller for continuing to send him all the phony memoirs,<sup>107</sup> tasked Julien with buying every new book that had anything sensational about it. But so that no infection would spread through the house, the secretary was told to put these books in a little bookcase in the marquis's own bedroom. He soon knew quite well that if any of these books were hostile to the interests of Throne or Altar, they would quickly disappear. And it certainly wasn't Norbert taking them off to read.

Julien exaggerated the significance of all this and began to believe Mademoiselle de La Mole had all the duplicity of a Machiavelli. But that presumed wickedness was one of her charms in his eyes, perhaps the only intellectual charm she possessed. His own boredom with the hypocrisy and all the talk about virtue led him to this excess.

He was exciting his imagination more than letting himself be carried away by love.

He had first lost himself in fantasies about Mademoiselle de La Mole's body, and her excellent taste in dress, the whiteness of her hands, the beauty of her arms, the *disinvoltura* visible in all her movements, and all this he found worthy of love. Then, to increase her charms, he began to see her as a kind of Catherine de Medici. No intrigue was too deep, no act too criminal for the character he created for her. She was the ideal of the Maslons, the Castanèdes, and the Frilairs whom he had admired in his youth. She was for him, in short, the ideal of Paris.

But was there ever anything more laughable than attributing profundity or villainy to the Parisian character?

It's possible that this trio is making fun of me, thought Julien. Reader, you haven't managed to learn much about his character if you aren't already pic-



turing to yourself that cold, somber expression his gaze assumed when he met that of Mathilde. Two or three times, Mademoiselle de La Mole was bold enough to give assurances of her friendship, and these were met with a bitter irony.

Stung by this sudden eccentricity of his, the young woman's heart—which was naturally cold, bored, and unreceptive to the intellectual—became just as passionate as that nature of hers allowed. But there was also a strong strain of pride in Mathilde's character, and thus this birth of a feeling that made her dependent on someone else for her entire happiness was accompanied by a deep sadness.

Julien had learned enough since arriving in Paris to realize that this was not the dry sadness of boredom. Instead of avidly pursuing parties, shows, and distractions of all sorts, she now avoided them.

Music performed by French singers bored Mathilde to death, and yet Julien, who made it his duty to remain at the Opéra till the end, observed that she had herself taken there as often as possible. He thought he could discern that she had lost a little of the perfect moderation that had marked her behavior before. Sometimes she responded to her friends with outrageous witticisms that hit their mark with a stinging energy. He thought she was especially harsh with the Marquis de Croisenois. That young man must be ferociously in love with money not to drop that girl, rich as she is! thought Julien. And as for him, feeling indignant at seeing her insult the dignity of the male, he doubled his coldness toward her. Often he went so far as to be almost rude with her.

However firmly resolved he was not to be taken in by Mathilde's signs of interest in him, they were so obvious on some days that Julien, from whose eyes the scales were at last beginning to fall, found her so pretty that he was sometimes abashed.

The skill and the carefulness of these young high society people might end up triumphing over my inexperience, he said to himself: I need to get away and put an end to all this. The marquis had recently entrusted him with the management of a number of small estates and houses he owned in the lower Languedoc region. Making a visit there became necessary: Monsieur de La

Mole consented, though somewhat unwillingly. In everything apart from his matter of high ambition, Julien had become like a second self to him.

So far, anyway, they haven't managed to trap me, said Julien to himself as he prepared for his departure. And whether the jokes Mademoiselle makes at the expense of those gentlemen were real or only meant to give me false confidence, they did amuse me.

If there is no conspiracy against the carpenter's son, I can't figure out Mademoiselle de La Mole, but it must be even worse for the Marquis de Croisenois. Yesterday, for example, there was no doubt about her foul mood, and I had the pleasure of seeing her clearly prefer me to a young man who's as noble and wealthy as I am plebeian and penniless. That's one of my finest victories; it'll keep me cheered up in the coach all the way across the Languedoc plains.

He had kept his departure a secret, but Mathilde knew even better than he did that he was leaving Paris the next day, and that he'd be gone a long while. She had recourse to a terrible headache, made worse by the stuffiness of the drawing room. She frequently got up and walked out into the garden, and her stinging witticisms so harried Norbert, the Marquis de Croisenois, Caylus, de Luz and several other young men who had come to dine at the Hôtel de La Mole that she finally drove them all away. She kept looking at Julien with a strange expression.

That expression may be all theatrics, thought Julien, but look at her labored breathing, and all that extreme emotion! Bah! he said to himself, who am I to evaluate all these things? This is the most sublime, the subtlest of all Parisian women. That quick breathing that almost made me feel for her—she might have learned it from Léontine Fay, whose performances she admires so.<sup>108</sup>

The two were left alone; the conversation was clearly languishing. No! Julien doesn't feel anything for me, Mathilde said to herself, feeling genuinely miserable.

As he was bidding her good night, she suddenly seized hold of his arm and held it tightly.

"You'll be receiving a letter from me tonight," she said, her voice so altered that it was scarcely recognizable.

The moment moved Julien deeply.

"My father," she continued, "has a real respect for your work, and rightly so. *You must not* leave tomorrow. Find some pretext." And with that, she ran off.

Her figure was charming. It would be impossible to have a prettier foot, and she ran with a grace that Julien found ravishing. But, Reader, can you guess what his next thought was, once she had disappeared? Yes, he took offense at her tone of command, at the way she said, "You must not." Louis XV, on his deathbed, was likewise greatly offended by a "you must," injudiciously spoken by his chief physician, and Louis XV was not some social climber.

An hour later, a servant brought Julien a letter; it was, quite simply, an open declaration of love.

The style is not overly affected, Julien thought, trying to employ literary terms to suppress the joy that was forcing his face into a smile and even making him laugh, despite himself.

Me! he exclaimed suddenly, his emotion overwhelming him. Me, a poor peasant, getting a declaration of love from a great lady!

As for me, I haven't done anything badly, he added, managing to restrain his joy a little. I've kept my dignity. I certainly never told her I love her. He paused to study the handwriting; Mademoiselle de La Mole had a pretty English style of handwriting. He needed some physical occupation to distract him from the surge of joy that was bordering on delirium.

"Your departure forced me to speak . . . It would be more than I could bear not to see you anymore . . ."

Now a thought occurred to Julien like an epiphany, interrupting his study of Mathilde's letter and doubling his joy. I've beaten the Marquis de Croisenois, he exclaimed, me, the one who only says serious things! And he's so good looking! He has that mustache, that elegant uniform; he always knows what to say, and the right time to say it, always witty, always sharp.

The moment was an exquisite one for Julien; he went wandering out into the garden, wild with happiness.

Later, he went up to his office and had himself announced to the Marquis de La Mole, who fortunately was still there. He easily convinced him,

showing him some papers that had recently arrived from Normandy, that the lawsuit there required his attention, and forced him to put off the journey to Languedoc.

"I've relieved to hear you're not going," the marquis said when they were finished talking business. "*I like seeing you.*" Julien left, but that phrase bothered him.

He likes seeing me—and I'm about to seduce his daughter! I may be about to make the marriage with the Marquis de Croisenois impossible, a marriage that is his great hope. If he isn't made a duke, at least his daughter would get a *tabouret*.<sup>109</sup> Julien briefly considered leaving for Languedoc anyway, despite Mathilde's letter and despite the conversation he had just had with the marquis. But that virtuous fantasy soon faded.

What a good fellow I am, he said to himself: me, a mere plebeian, having pity on a family of high rank! Me, the one the Duc de Chaulnes calls a "domestic." How does the marquis augment his tremendous fortune? By selling stock when he hears at the Palace that there might be some coup d'état the next day. And then look at me, hurled way down onto the lowest rung of the social ladder by the hand of a Providence that's been like a wicked stepmother to me—me, born with a noble heart but not so much as a thousand francs a year—that is, without my daily bread—yes, that's precisely the phrase: *without my daily bread*—should I refuse a pleasure when it's offered to me? When a clear, cool spring appears to quench my thirst when I've been crawling miserably across a burning desert! Oh no, I'm not that stupid. It's every man for himself in this desert of egoism they call life.

And now he remembered some disdainful glances that Mademoiselle de La Mole had cast at him, as well as those from the *ladies*, her friends.

The pleasure of triumphing over the Marquis de Croisenois did away with whatever was left of his virtuous impulse.

Oh, I hope he'll be angry! thought Julien, and how skillfully I'd thrust my sword at him now. He struck a pose as if dealing a blow with a sword. Before this, I was just an underling, cravenly relying on my little bit of courage. But after this letter, I'm his equal.

Yes, he said to himself with an infinite voluptuous pleasure, drawing out his words slowly, the merits of the marquis and of myself have been weighed, and the poor carpenter from the Jura has come out ahead.

Good! he cried, there's the signature for my reply, all ready to go. Do not imagine, Mademoiselle de La Mole, that I'm going to be forgetting my proper station. No, I'll make sure you really understand, really feel what it's like to be the son of a carpenter, for whom you're betraying a descendant of the famous Guy de Croisenois, who followed Saint Louis to the Crusades.

Julien couldn't contain his joy. He simply had to go back down to the garden. He had locked himself up in his room, but now the place seemed too tight for breathing.

Me, a poor peasant from the Jura, he kept on repeating, me, condemned forever to wear that miserable black suit! Well, twenty years back, I'd have been wearing the same uniform as they! Back then, a man like me would either be killed or made a general *by the age of thirty-six*. That letter, which he gripped tightly in his hand, gave him the stature and the attitude of a hero. Nowadays, true, with this black suit, a man at forty can earn a hundred thousand a year and wear the blue sash, like the bishop of Beauvais.<sup>110</sup>

Well! he said, laughing like Mephistopheles, I've got a better mind than theirs. I know how to choose the right uniform for my century. He felt his ambition swelling within him, along with his attachment to the ecclesiastical habit. Plenty of cardinals were even lower born than I was, and they went on to rule! My compatriot Granville, for example.<sup>111</sup>

Bit by bit Julien's agitation waned, and his prudence rose to the surface again. He said to himself, like his master Tartuffe, whose role he knew by heart:

I may believe those words an honest ploy.

.....

I won't confide my trust in words that sweet

Unless her favors, for which I sigh,

Come to assure me that she means what she says.

*Tartuffe*, act 4, scene 5

Tartuffe, too, was brought down by a woman, and he was as good a man as anybody else . . . My response might be made public . . . but here's the remedy for that, he added, enunciating each of his words slowly in an accent of icy ferocity: We'll begin our reply by quoting the liveliest lines from the letter of the sublime Mathilde.

Yes, but then a set of Monsieur de Croisenois's lackeys jump me and take away the original.

No, because I'm well armed, and I'm accustomed, as everyone knows, to firing at lackeys.

All right! Say that one of them actually has some courage, and he leaps on me. He's been promised a hundred napoleons. I kill him, or I wound him, fine—that's just what they want me to do. They have me thrown into prison, all quite legally. I'm taken to court, convicted, and off I go, in strict accordance with justice and equity on the part of the judges, to keep Messieurs Fontan and Magallon company at Poissy.<sup>112</sup> And there, I sleep every night heaped together with four hundred other wretches . . . And I'm supposed to have pity on these people! he cried, jumping up suddenly. What pity do they have for us in the Third Estate when they get us in their grip? And that phrase was the last sigh of any gratitude to Monsieur de La Mole which, despite himself, had continued to trouble him.

Slow down just a moment, my dear gentlemen: I see your little Machiavelian stroke there. The priests Maslon or Castanède couldn't have done it any better. You'll snatch this *provocative* letter away from me, and I'll end up being volume two of Colonel Caron at Colmar.<sup>113</sup>

Just a moment, Messieurs: I'm going to have this dangerous letter sent to Father Pirard. He's an honest Jansenist, and as such not capable of being bribed. Yes, but then he does open letters . . . no, I'll send it to Fouqué.

We must admit that Julien had a terrifying look in his eye, and his facial expression was hideous; it expressed nothing but crime, unmitigated wickedness. This was man upon whom fortune had not smiled, at war now with all of society.

*To arms!* cried Julien. And he leaped down the porch steps in front of the house in a single bound. He went into the scribe's shop on the corner; he frightened the man. "Copy this," he told him, handing him the letter from Mademoiselle de La Mole.

While the writer was working, he wrote a letter to Fouqué himself; he asked him to take care of a precious item for him. But, he interrupted himself, the inspector at the post office<sup>114</sup> will open the letter and give you back the one you're looking for . . . So, no, Messieurs. He went out and bought a large Bible from a Protestant bookseller, carefully hid Mathilde's letter inside the cover, packed it up along with his own letter, and sent the package off to one of Fouqué's employees, whose name was unknown to anyone in Paris.

That done, he returned, his step light and joyful, to the Hôtel de La Mole. Now *it's time for you and me!* he cried, and locking the door to his room, threw off his coat:

"Come now, Mademoiselle," he wrote to Mathilde, "is it really Mademoiselle de La Mole who, by the hands of her father's servant Arsène has sent a most seductive letter to a poor carpenter from the Jura, no doubt to make fun of his gullibility . . ." And he proceeded to transcribe the most unambiguous phrases from the letter he had received.

His own letter would have done honor to the diplomatic prudence of the Chevalier de Beauvoisis. It was now only ten o'clock; Julien, intoxicated with happiness and the sense of his own power, a sensation quite new to the poor devil, went off to the Italian Opéra. He listened to his old friend Geronimo sing. Music had never exalted him like this. He was a god.<sup>115</sup>

## A YOUNG LADY'S THOUGHTS

*Such perplexity! So many sleepless nights! Great God! Am I making myself detestable? He'll detest me himself. But he's leaving, he's going away.*

ALFRED DE MUSSET<sup>116</sup>

Writing the letter had cost Mathilde a considerable struggle. Whatever accounted for her initial interest in Julien, it soon grew stronger than the pride that, ever since she had first become aware of herself, had reigned without rival in her heart. That haughty, icy spirit was now carried away, for the first time, by passionate feeling. But if that feeling overpowered her pride, it was still faithful to the habits of pride. Two months of inner combats and new sensations had entirely redone, so to speak, her whole mental life.

Mathilde believed she saw happiness ahead. Such an all-powerful, imagined sight, for a courageous spirit linked to a superior mind, like hers, had to fight a long series of battles against her sense of her dignity and all her feelings of common duty. One morning at seven o'clock, she abruptly showed up in her mother's bedroom asking permission to take refuge in Villequier. The marquise didn't even deign to respond, instead simply telling her to go back to bed. And that was the final effort put up by common sense and deference to accepted ideas.

The fear of doing something wrong and contravening the kind of ideas held sacred by the de Caylus types, the de Luz, the de Croisenois—this sort of fear had no power over her; such creatures, she thought, had not been formed in such a way as to be able to understand someone like her; she would have asked their opinion if it had been a matter of buying a coach or some real estate. What really frightened her was the prospect of Julien's being displeased with her.

But perhaps he only *seems* to be a superior kind of man?



She detested lack of character; this was the one real objection she had to the handsome young men who surrounded her. The more they performed their graceful little mockeries of everything that doesn't conform to the fashion, or which fails to conform while thinking it does, the more they were diminished in her eyes.

They were brave, and that was the whole of it. But then again, how brave? she asked herself. Brave in a duel, but a duel is nothing but a ritual. Everything is known in advance, even what you're supposed to say while falling. Stretched out on the grass, your hand on your heart, you must give a generous pardon to your adversary, and add a word or two for some young beauty, who's imaginary more often than not, or who will go to a ball on the evening of your death so as not to arouse any suspicions.

They brave danger at the head of their squadron, all aglitter with steel, but what about a danger that's solitary, exceptional, unexpected, really ugly?

Alas! said Mathilde to herself, it was only in the court of Henri III that you could find men who were great both by character and by birth! Oh, if Julien had served at Jarnac or at Moncontour, I wouldn't have any more doubts.<sup>117</sup> Those were the days of strength, of power; Frenchmen weren't mere dolls then. The day of battle was, in effect, the simplest day for them.

Their lives weren't spent imprisoned like an Egyptian mummy, wrapped up in the same covering everybody else is wearing, always the same. Yes, she continued, it took more true courage then in leaving the Hôtel de Soissons at eleven at night, where Catherine de Medici was, than it takes today to go rushing off to Algeria. A man's life was one danger after another. But today, civilization and the prefect of police have chased away all the dangers, all the unexpected.<sup>118</sup> If the unexpected or the dangerous appears in our thinking, there'll be no end of epigrams devised to cope with it. If they arise in events, there'll be no shortage of cowardice arising from our fear. Whatever folly our fear makes us commit will be excused. Oh, this degenerate, boring century! That's what Boniface de La Mole would have called it, if he could have risen out of his grave in 1793, his decapitated head having to see the spectacle of seventeen of his descendants meekly being led off like sheep to be guillotined! Their death was certain, but it would have been bad form to kill one or two Jacobins.

Oh, in the heroic, glorious time of Boniface de La Mole, Julien would have been the squadron leader, and my brother would have been the young priest with conventional ways, wisdom in his eyes and moderation in his speech.

Some months back, Mathilde had given up hope of ever finding someone a little different from the common mold. She had found some pleasure in allowing herself to write to a few young men in society. Such bold unconventionality, so imprudent in a young woman, could dishonor her in the eyes of Monsieur de Croisenois, in those of his grandfather the Duc de Chaulnes, and those of everyone in the Chaulnes family, who, seeing the projected marriage broken off, would want an explanation why. In those days, after she had written one of those letters, Mathilde was unable to sleep. But those letters had merely been replies to others.

With this one, though, she had dared to say she was in love. She wrote *first* (what a terrible word!), and to a man in the lowest ranks of society.

Those details assured her, if this were to be found out, of eternal dishonor. Which of the women who came to visit her mother would dare to take her part? What possible way of putting it could there be, to soften the ghastly contempt in all the drawing rooms?

Even speaking to a man was a frightful thing—but to write! *There are certain things one does not put in writing*, cried Napoleon when he heard of the surrender at Baylen.<sup>119</sup> And Julien was the one who told her that anecdote—as if he were teaching her a lesson in advance!

But all this was nothing, for Mathilde's anguish had other causes. Quite apart from the horrible effect upon society, the indelible stain of profound contempt—for she was committing an outrage against her caste—Mathilde was writing to a creature of an entirely different nature than those of the Croisenois, the de Luz, the Caylus.

The deeply *unknown* aspect of Julien's character had already made her nervous, even when she was forming an ordinary friendship. And now she was about to make him her lover—her master even, perhaps!

What kind of claims will he make on me, if he ever gains the upper hand with me? Well, then I'll be able to say, with Medea: "In the midst of all these perils, I remain MYSELF!"<sup>120</sup>

Julien had no reverence for the nobility of blood, she believed. Even worse, he might feel no love for her!

In these last moments of terrible doubts, feminine pride reasserted itself. But everything ought to be strange and different in the destiny of a girl like me, an exasperated Mathilde exclaimed. And so the pride that had been her companion since the cradle now arose to do battle with her virtue. This was the moment when Julien's departure came along to make her take action.

(People like her are, fortunately, quite rare.)

Late that night, Julien had the malice to have a large, heavy trunk carried down to the porter's lodge; to carry it, he called for the servant who was courting Mademoiselle de La Mole's chambermaid. This little ruse might result in nothing, he said to himself, but if it succeeds, she'll think I've left. He fell asleep, amused with the idea. Mathilde never so much as closed an eye.

Very early the next morning, Julien left the house without anyone seeing him, but he returned before eight.

He had scarcely come into the library when Mademoiselle de La Mole appeared in the doorway. He handed her his reply. He thought that he really ought to speak to her, which would have been easy enough, anyway, but Mademoiselle de La Mole didn't want to listen, and she disappeared. Julien was delighted, because he didn't know what to say.

Now, if all this is not some kind of game concocted with Comte Norbert, it's clear that it must have been the frigid expression in my eyes that somehow kindled this bizarre love that this highborn beauty has decided she feels for me. I'd be stupider than I really need to be if I were to let myself get pulled into feeling any attraction to this tall, blond doll. Putting it that way made him colder and more calculating than he had ever been before.

In the battle that's coming, he continued, her pride in her birth will be the high hill, like a military fortification standing between her and me. That's where I need to maneuver. I did wrong to stay on in Paris. Putting off my departure is demeaning to me and exposes me if all this does turn out to be a game. What would have been the danger in sticking to the departure? I'd have been laughing at them, in case they're laughing at me. And if she really does have any interest in me, I'd have multiplied that interest a hundredfold.

The letter from Mademoiselle de La Mole had so flattered and thrilled Julien's vanity that while he was laughing with joy at what had happened to him, he had forgotten to think seriously about the advantages of departing.

One of the weaknesses in his character was an extreme sensitivity to his own mistakes. He was furious now with this one and had almost forgotten altogether about the great victory that had preceded it when, at about nine o'clock, Mademoiselle de La Mole appeared in the doorway of the library, tossed a letter to him, and ran away.

It looks like this is going to be one of those epistolary novels, he said as he picked up the letter. The enemy has made a false move, and my role now is to be all chilly and virtuous.

This letter asked him for a definitive answer, indeed demanded it haughtily, which only augmented his inner glee. He had fun writing two pages designed to be utterly mystifying to anyone who wanted to mock him, and then to add a bit more pleasantries, he announced that he would in fact be taking his departure the following morning.

When the letter was ready, the garden will be a good place to get it to her, he thought, and he walked there. He looked up at the window of Mademoiselle de La Mole's bedroom.

Hers was on the second floor, next to her mother's rooms, but there was a wide mezzanine below it.

The second floor was so high up that, as he walked along the path lined with lime-trees, his letter in his hand, he could not be perceived from Mademoiselle de La Mole's window. The vaulted canopy of carefully sculpted lime trees cut off the view. What am I doing? Julien thought angrily. Another stupid mistake! If they really are trying to make a fool of me, letting myself be seen walking around with a letter in my hand just aids my enemies' cause.

Norbert's chamber was directly above that of his sister, and if Julien were to exit the canopy formed by the lime tree branches, the count and his friends would be able to see his every move.

Mademoiselle de La Mole appeared at her window; he showed his letter to her; she nodded. Julien immediately ran up to his own room and met on the

stairs, as if by chance, the beautiful Mathilde, who took his letter with perfect assurance and laughter in her eyes.

How much passion there used to be in the eyes of that poor Madame de Rênal, Julien thought, when, even after we had been intimate for over six months, she dared to receive a letter from me! In the whole time, I swear, she never looked at me with laughter in her eyes.

He did not express so clearly the rest of his thought at that point. Was he ashamed at the frivolity of his motives? But then, he did let himself go on to think, what a difference between the two women—the elegance of her morning gown, the elegance in her whole bearing! Any man with any taste who caught sight of Mademoiselle de La Mole from thirty paces' distance would immediately divine her social rank. You could call it explicit, visual worth.

While enjoying his own cleverness, Julien continued to avoid one other factor that was on his mind: Madame de Rênal had had no Marquis de Croisenois to sacrifice for him. His only rival for her was that fool of a subprefect Monsieur Charcot, who had himself called de Maugiron, which he could get away with only because the de Maugiron family had died out.

At five o'clock, Julien received a third letter; it was tossed toward him from the doorway of the library. Again, Mademoiselle de La Mole fled immediately. What a writing mania the woman has, Julien exclaimed with a laugh, when it would be so easy for us simply to talk! Clearly, the enemy wants my letters, and preferably lots of them! He deliberately took his time before opening this one. Ah, more elegant phrases, he thought; but as he read on, he went pale. The entire letter was only a few lines:

*I need to speak to you; I must speak to you, and tonight; when it's exactly one o'clock, be out in the garden. Take the gardener's big ladder, from over by the well; position it under my window and climb up to me. The moon will be bright, but that doesn't matter.*

## IS IT A PLOT?

*Ah, how cruel the interval between a grand plan and its execution! How many vain terrors! How much doubting! It's a matter of life—no, of more than that: of honor.*

SCHILLER<sup>121</sup>

This is turning serious, thought Julien . . . and a little too clear, he added after a moment. Come on! This lovely young miss can talk with me in the library with a freedom that, by the grace of God, is absolute; the marquis, for fear that I'll pester him with business matters, never comes in. Well then! Monsieur de La Mole and Comte Norbert are the only people who ever come in here, and they're out of the house virtually the whole day; we could easily keep an eye out for their return, but instead the sublime Mathilde, who could be a worthy match for even a sovereign prince, asks me to do something that's abominably reckless!

Clearly, they either want to ruin me or make a fool of me, at the least. First, they tried to get at me through my letters, but those turned out to be too prudent. Well then, now they want me to do something that'll be as clear as daylight. These fine little gentlemen must think I'm either incredibly stupid or incredibly vain. What the devil: I'm supposed to climb up a ladder, up twenty-five feet to the second floor, and in the brightest moonlight ever—everyone would have plenty of time to see me, even in the neighboring houses! Oh, wouldn't I make a fine sight up there on my ladder! Julien went up to his room and immediately began packing, whistling as he did so. He was determined to leave and not even reply to the note.

But wise as that resolution was, it gave him no peace of mind. What if, just by chance, he said suddenly to himself, his trunk packed and closed, Mathilde is acting in good faith! In that case, I'd be taking the coward's way out, in her

eyes. I wasn't born noble, so I've got to show great personal qualities, and they must always be at the ready, with no self-flattering evasions, and I have to make sure my actions reveal those qualities . . .

He spent a quarter of an hour thinking and pacing in his room. What's the good of denying it? he asked himself at last. I'd be a coward in her eyes. I'd lose not only the most brilliant young woman in all high society—which is what everybody called her at the Duc de Retz's ball—but also the divine pleasure of seeing the Marquis de Croisenois, son of a duke and a man who'll be a duke himself someday, thrown aside for me. A charming young man, with all the attributes I lack: knowledge of how things are done, birth, fortune . . .

Oh, the remorse over that would haunt me the rest of my life—and not for her—no, there'll always be plenty of mistresses available!

... *But there's only one honor!*

As old Don Diego says.<sup>122</sup> And look at me, clearly and obviously running away at the first danger I encounter. That duel with Monsieur de Beauvoisis wasn't much more than a joke. This is completely different. I could be shot dead by a servant, but that's the least of it: I could let myself be dishonored!

So it's getting serious, old boy, he added, smiling and putting on a Gascon accent.<sup>123</sup> We're talking about *honor*. No poor devil, born as low down the social ladder as I was, will ever have a chance like this again. Good things could come my way, but they'd always be inferior to this . . .

He reflected at length, pacing rapidly back and forth, stopping abruptly now and then. His room had been furnished with a magnificent marble bust of Cardinal Richelieu, and despite himself it caught his eye now. The bust seemed to be staring at him with a stern expression, as if it were chastising him for lacking the boldness that is so natural to the French character. In your day, great one, would I have hesitated?

At the worst, Julien said to himself at last, let's suppose that it really is a trap. Well, it's also very shady and compromising for a young lady. They know I'm not the kind who can be silenced. They'd have to kill me. That would have been fine back in 1574, in the time of Boniface de La Mole, but they wouldn't

dare today. These men are not like they were then. Mademoiselle de La Mole is so universally envied! The next day, four hundred drawing rooms would be echoing with the tale of her shame, and you can imagine the glee with which the tale would be told!

The servants gossip among themselves about her obvious preference for me—I know it. I’ve heard them . . .

And on the other hand, her letters! . . . They might think I’d have them on me. So they take hold of me in her room to snatch them away. I’d be up against two, three, maybe four men, who knows? But where would they get the men? Where could you find some discreet flunkies in Paris? They’d be afraid of falling afoul of the law . . . No! It’d be Caylus, Croisenois, de Luz, that crowd—they’d do it themselves. And they’d all be tempted by the thought of cornering me like that, and what a laughingstock it would make me. Beware, Mister Secretary: think of what happened to Abelard!<sup>124</sup>

Well, by God, gentlemen, I’ll leave my marks on you. I’ll strike at your faces, like Caesar’s soldiers at Pharsalus<sup>125</sup> . . . But the letters: I’ll put them in a safe place.

Julien made copies of the last two, hid them inside a volume of the splendid Voltaire edition from the library, and carried the originals off to post them.

When he returned: What kind of insanity am I rushing into? he asked himself, both surprised and terrified. He had spent the last quarter of an hour without giving any thought as to what exactly he was going to do later that night.

If I refuse, I’ll despise myself afterward! For the rest of my life, this act will nag me and keep me doubting myself—and for me, self-doubt is the most crushing misery there is. Didn’t I go through enough of that with Amanda’s lover? I think I could forgive myself more easily for committing a downright crime. Once I’d confessed it, I’d forget all about it.

And to think that I’d be the rival of a man with one of the most distinguished names in all of France, and I would go off with a light heart and let myself be proved his inferior! No, it’s cowardice not to go. That’s it then! cried Julien, leaping up on his feet. But then again, she’s really so good looking . . .

If it’s not some kind of treachery, look how foolishly she’s acting for me! . . .



And if it's all just meant to keep me confused, then damn it, gentlemen, it's up to me to take this joke and turn it into something serious—and that's what I'll do.

But what if they pin my arms down the minute I enter the room? They might have set up some ingenious kind of equipment!

It's just like a duel, he said to himself with a laugh. You can parry any thrust, as the fencing master says, but the good Lord, who likes things to come to an end eventually, makes one of the two forget to parry. Anyway, this should take care of things, he said, pulling out his two pistols; and though the priming was still fresh, he replaced it.

There were still hours to wait, and in order to be doing something, he wrote to Fouqué:

*My friend, only open the enclosed letter in case of an accident, or if you hear that something strange has happened to me. Then, remove the proper names from the manuscript I'm sending you, and make eight copies; send them to the newspapers in Marseille, Bordeaux, Lyon, Brussels, etc.; then, ten days later, have the manuscript printed, and send the first copy to the Marquis de La Mole; two weeks after that, scatter the others around the streets of Verrières.*

Julien saw to it that this little memo of justification, arranged in the form of a kind of tale, which Fouqué was only to open in case of an accident, was as little compromising to Mademoiselle de La Mole as possible; but still, it did paint an accurate picture of his situation.

Julien had just sealed the parcel when the bell rang for dinner; it made his heart begin to pound. His imagination, focused on the narrative he had just composed, led now to all sorts of tragic presentiments. He pictured himself seized by the servants, garroted, carried down into a cellar with his mouth gagged. There, another servant kept watch over him, and if the honor of the family required that the incident must have a tragic outcome, it would be easy to make use of one of those poisons that leave no traces; they could simply say he had fallen ill and died and carry his dead body back up to his room.

Moved by his own fiction, like a playwright, Julien felt real fear when he entered the dining room. He looked at the servants, all dressed in their formal livery. He studied their faces. Which are the ones they've chosen to do tonight's work? he asked himself. In this family, the memories of the court of Henri III are so vivid, and so often recounted that, if they ever felt themselves offended, they'd be more decisive about it than other families of their rank. He looked at Mademoiselle de La Mole, trying to read the family's plans in her eyes; she was pale, and looked positively medieval. He had never seen her looking so grand; she was truly beautiful, truly imposing. He felt himself almost falling in love. *Pallida morte futura*,<sup>126</sup> he said to himself (Her pallor announces her heroic plan).

It was in vain that he went out into the garden after dinner, walking there for a long while; Mademoiselle de La Mole did not appear. Being able to speak with her just then would have taken a great weight off his heart.

But why not admit it? He was afraid. Now that he had decided to go through with it, he gave himself up entirely to the fear without shame. What does it matter how I feel now, he said to himself, as long as I find the courage when it's time to act? He walked around to reconnoiter the situation, going over and lifting the ladder to get a sense of its weight.

This is an instrument, he said to himself with a laugh, destined to keep playing a role in my life! Here and in Verrières. But what a difference! The other time, he added with a sigh, I didn't have to fear the person for whom I was taking the risk. And what a difference, too, in the level of risk!

I ran the risk of being shot in Monsieur de Rênal's garden, but it would not have been any dishonor to me. They could easily find some story to make my death sound like a mystery. But here, what horrible tales wouldn't they be telling in the drawing rooms of the Hôtel de Chaulnes, the Hôtel de Caylus, the Hôtel de Retz, etc.—everywhere, in short. I'll go down in history as a kind of monster.

For two or three years, he added, laughing at himself. But then the thought seemed to overwhelm him. And what about me? How would I justify myself?

Even supposing that Fouqué prints the manuscript after my death, that would only be one infamy the more. What—here I'm welcomed into a home, and to repay the hospitality I'm shown, all the kindnesses heaped upon me, I print a pamphlet telling everything! I assault the reputation of women! Oh, I'd rather just be a dupe—a thousand times over.

It was a terrible evening.

## 16

# ONE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING

*The garden was very large, recently laid out in the best of taste.*

*But the trees were a century old. The place had a pastoral air about it.*

MASSINGER<sup>127</sup>

He was just about ready to countermand the instructions he'd sent to Fouqué when he heard the clock strike eleven. He rattled the key as he turned it in his bedroom door, as if he were locking himself in. Then he left his room, on tiptoe, to see what was happening elsewhere in the house, especially on the fourth floor where the servants' quarters were. There was nothing out of the ordinary. One of Mademoiselle de La Mole's chambermaids was giving a party, and the servants were all happily drinking punch together. Anybody laughing like that, thought Julien, couldn't possibly be part of some nocturnal expedition. They'd be more serious.

Eventually he made his way down to the garden and stood over in a dark corner. If they plan to keep the household staff from knowing their plans, they'd probably have their men come in over the garden walls to take me by surprise.

If Monsieur de Croisenois is orchestrating all this with a cool head, he'll want to find some way of seizing me before I enter her room, so as to avoid compromising the girl he plans to marry.

He reconnoitered the garden, military-style, being very precise about it. It's a question of my honor, he thought. If I make some slip, I won't be able to excuse myself by saying I hadn't thought of that.

The night was so clear that he felt desperate. Around eleven, the moon had risen, and by twelve-thirty it was illuminating the whole exterior of the house facing the garden.

She's insane, Julien said to himself. As one o'clock sounded, there was still a light on in Comte Norbert's room. Julien had never in his life felt such fear. He could see only the dangers in the whole enterprise, and he felt no enthusiasm at all.

He went over and picked up the huge ladder, waited five minutes to see if there would be a countermand, and then, at 1:05, he leaned the ladder up against Mathilde's window. He made his way up softly, a pistol in his hand, surprised that he was not being attacked. As he drew near the window, she opened it silently:

"So there you are at last, Monsieur," Mathilde said with evident feeling. "I've been watching your movements down there for the last hour."

Julien was deeply embarrassed, for he had no idea how to conduct himself, and of course he felt no love at all. In his embarrassment, he thought he ought to do something daring, so he leaned over and tried to embrace Mathilde.

"Oh! No, Monsieur!" she said, pushing him away.

Feeling relieved at being turned away, he quickly looked around the room: the moonlight was so bright that the shadows in Mathilde's room were deep black. There could very well be men hidden in here, he thought.

"What's that in the pocket of your coat?" Mathilde asked, thrilled at finding a topic for conversation. She felt strangely uncomfortable; all the feelings of restraint and shyness natural to a well-born girl now reasserted themselves, and they were torturing her.

“Oh, I have all sorts of weapons and pistols,” replied Julien, equally happy to find something to say.

“The ladder needs to be put away,” said Mathilde.

“That thing is huge, and it could easily break the drawing-room windows down below, or those on the mezzanine.”

“It mustn’t break any windows,” Mathilde replied, trying hard to establish a normal tone of conversation. “It looks to me as if you could lower the ladder gently with a rope attached to the top rung. I always keep plenty of ropes here.”

So this is a woman in love! thought Julien. She dares to say she’s in love! All this coolness, all this careful precaution—it tells me I’m not exactly beating out Monsieur de Croisenois, as I stupidly thought. No, I’m just his successor. But then, does it matter? It’s not as if I’m in love with her. And I am beating out the Marquis in this sense: he’ll be furious to know he has a successor, and even more furious when he learns that it’s me. What an arrogant look he gave me the other day at the Café Tortoni, pretending not to recognize me.<sup>128</sup> And then when he simply had to bow to me, how bitter he seemed about it!

Julien had attached the rope to the top rung of the ladder, and he now lowered it gently, bending out over the balcony to be sure it didn’t touch any of the windows on its way down. This would be the perfect time to kill me, he thought, if there’s anyone hiding in Mathilde’s room, but a perfect silence continued to reign over all.

The ladder touched the ground; Julien managed to get it to lie down in the bed of exotic flowers that ran alongside the wall.

“Oh, what will my mother say,” said Mathilde, “when she sees all her fine plants crushed like that? . . . But we need to get rid of the rope,” she added in a perfectly matter-of-fact tone. “If it’s seen hanging from the balcony, it’ll be hard to explain.”

“But then how me gwan get down?” asked Julien in a jesting tone, imitating Creole dialect. (One of the chambermaids had been born in San Domingo.)

“You gwan go right out the door,” said Mathilde, delighted with the idea. Oh, this man really is worthy of my love! she was thinking.

Julien had just let the rope drop down into the garden when Mathilde clutched his arm. He thought he was being grabbed by an enemy, and he spun around, a dagger in his hand. She had thought she'd heard someone opening a window. They both stood stock still, holding their breath. The moonlight illuminated the two of them clearly. The sound was not repeated; there was no further reason for alarm.

Then their mutual embarrassment returned; both of them felt it greatly. Julien made sure the door was fully bolted. He really wanted to look under the bed but didn't dare; one or two servants could have fit under there. Finally, his fear of self-reproach won out, and he went ahead and looked.

Mathilde had become prey to all the agonies of the most extreme timidity. She felt her situation was horrible.

Finally, she asked, "What have you done with my letters?"

Julien thought, Ah—this is a perfect opportunity for disappointing those gentlemen if they're hiding and listening, and for avoiding having to fight with them!

"The first one is hidden in a big Protestant Bible, which last night's mail coach has taken far away."

He spoke quite clearly and went into all the details so as to be heard by any persons hiding in the two large mahogany armoires, which he had been afraid to inspect.

"The two others have been mailed off to the same place as the first."

"But my God, why all these precautions?" asked Mathilde, astonished.

Julien thought, Why should I lie?, and he proceeded to tell her all his suspicions.

"So that accounts for the coldness in your letters!" cried Mathilde, in a tone almost wild with tenderness.

Julien, though, only noticed one detail: she had called him *tu*, and that made him lose his head—or, in any case, it made him lose all his suspicions; now he was emboldened to take that so beautiful girl, for whom he felt such respect, in his arms. She pushed him away again, but half-heartedly this time.

He had recourse to his memory, as he had done once before in Besançon with Amanda, and began reciting some lovely sentences from *La nouvelle Héloïse*.

“You have the heart of a real man,” she said, without listening very closely to what he was saying. “I wanted to prove your courage, I admit it. Those early suspicions of yours, and your resolve to come up here anyway, show you to be even more fearless than I thought.”

Mathilde was making a real effort to continue using *tu* with him; clearly, she was paying more attention to this strange new way of speaking than to what she was actually saying. But the ongoing use of the *tu*, without any particular tone of affection, soon ceased giving Julien any pleasure, and he was surprised to find he didn’t feel any happiness. Finally, to try to engender some, he turned to his rational faculties. He saw himself esteemed by this girl with so much pride, who never praised anything or anyone without some qualification, and reasoning thus, he found some gratification for his self-esteem.

But, true, it was not that voluptuous bliss he had felt sometimes with Madame de Rênal. There was nothing tender in his feelings now, in these first moments. His ambition was marvelously gratified, though, and Julien was nothing if not ambitious. He spoke anew about the people of whom he had been suspicious, and about the various precautions he had taken. As he spoke, he was thinking about how he might gain some advantage from his victory.

Mathilde, feeling very embarrassed again, and with the air of a person who deeply regretted what she had done, now found some relief in finding a subject to talk about. They discussed how they would meet in the future. Julien enjoyed displaying more of the inventiveness and courage in the course of their conversation. There were some sharp-eyed people about, like that Tanbeau, who was definitely a spy, but then Mathilde and he were hardly unskillful people.

What could be easier than to see each other in the library, where they could discuss everything?

“I can appear anywhere in the house without arousing any suspicions,” Julien added, “almost including Madame de La Mole’s bedroom.” In fact, it was

necessary to pass through her room to get to the daughter's. But if Mathilde thought it best for him to continue using the ladder, he would, with the most intoxicating pleasure, expose himself again to that minor danger.

Listening to him, Mathilde was shocked by his triumphant tone. So he is my master now! she said to herself. She was already feeling tortured by remorse. Her reason was aghast at the signal act of madness she had just committed. If she could have, she would have annihilated both herself and Julien right then. When, for an instant now and then, the force of her will would briefly silence her remorse, her feelings of shyness and an injured modesty made her feel even worse. She had in no way foreseen the feelings she was having now.

"Still, I need to say something to him," she said to herself finally. "That's what one does, one talks to one's lover." And then, as if to fulfill a duty, and with a tenderness more evident in the words she chose than in her tone of voice, she told him about the various resolutions she had come to regarding him over the past several days.

She had decided that if he did dare to come to her room using the gardener's ladder, as she instructed him, she would give herself to him. But nobody has ever said such tender things in so cold and polite a tone. So far, their rendezvous was all ice. It was enough to make a person hate love. What a moral lesson for imprudent young women! Was it worthwhile to risk her entire future for a moment like this?

After many long moments of uncertainty, which to an impartial observer might have looked a great deal like hatred—so difficult it was for the self-respect a woman owes herself to give in to her own steely determination—she finally gave herself to him, like an obliging mistress.

To tell the truth, all the transports she claimed to feel were just a bit *contrived*. Impassioned love was still for her a model to be imitated rather than a real state of being.

Mademoiselle de La Mole believed she was fulfilling a duty to herself and her lover. The poor boy, she said to herself, showed such courage that he deserves to be made happy. Otherwise, I'd be the one who lacks character. But



she would have happily paid the price of eternal suffering to get out of the cruel necessity in which she found herself.

Despite the violence she was doing to herself, she retained perfect control over the things she said. Would it be prudent to describe that night any further?<sup>129</sup>

No regret, no reproach arose to do any damage to that night, though it was a night that seemed more extraordinary, more singular, than happy to Julien. What a difference, great God, from the final twenty-four hours he had spent at Verrières! These fine Parisian manners find a way to ruin everything, love included, he said to himself, though most unjustly.

He gave himself up to such reflections while standing in one of the big mahogany armoires, into which he had been hurriedly ushered when a noise was heard from the room next door, which was that of Madame de La Mole. Mathilde went with her mother to Mass, the maids soon were done with the rooms, and Julien escaped easily before they returned to complete their tasks.

He mounted his horse and rode off toward the most solitary areas in the Meudon forest.<sup>130</sup> He felt much more surprise than happiness. When a little gust of happiness did, now and then, flutter in his heart, it was like the kind a young lieutenant feels when, following some bold action, his general has promoted him to colonel; he felt he had been carried up onto a great height. Everything that had been above him yesterday was now either on his level or, even, below him. Bit by bit, as his horse covered mile after mile, Julien's happiness began to swell.

If there was nothing truly tender in his heart, this was because, strange as it may seem, Mathilde, in every detail of her conduct toward him, had been carrying out a duty. There was nothing unexpected for her in all the events of the night, except the suffering and the shame she had found herself feeling instead of the utter happiness that the novels described.

But maybe I was wrong? Maybe I'm not really in love with him, she said to herself.

## AN OLD SWORD

*I now mean to be serious;—it is time,  
 Since laughter nowadays is deem'd too serious.  
 A jest at vice by virtue's called a crime.*

**DON JUAN, CANTO XIII, STANZA 1**

She did not appear at dinner. When evening came, she made an appearance in the drawing room, but she did not look at Julien. This behavior seemed strange to him. But, he thought, I don't know their ways. All I know of the ways of high society comes from observing, over a hundred times, their daily acts and habits.<sup>131</sup> She'll no doubt give me some good reason for it all. But disturbed by his own extreme curiosity, he continued to study the expression on Mathilde's face; he couldn't help but conclude that she had a stern, hostile look about her. Clearly this was not the same woman who, the night before, experienced, or feigned to experience, transports of ecstasy too extreme to be real.

The next day, and the day after that: the same coldness on her part. She didn't look at him; she seemed unaware of his existence. Julien, consumed by an increasing anxiety, was now a thousand miles away from those feelings of triumph that had thrilled him on the first day. Could this be, he asked himself, a retreat into virtue? But that was too bourgeois a word for the highborn Mathilde.

In her everyday life, she has no interest in religion, thought Julien. She just sees it as something that serves the interests of her caste.

But could it be simple feminine delicacy that's making her bitterly regret the mistake she's made? Julien believed he had been her first lover.

But, he said to himself at other moments, I have to admit that there's nothing natural, simple, or tender in her whole way of being. I've never seen her looking more like a queen who has just descended from her throne.<sup>132</sup> Could it be that

she despises me? It would fit her somehow, to reproach herself for what she's done for me, simply because of the lowness of my birth.

While Julien, whose mind teemed with the prejudices he had picked up from books and from his memories of Verrières, continued to ponder the chimera of a loving mistress who no longer gives a thought to her own life after she has made her lover happy, Mathilde's own vanity had made her furious with him.

Since she had not been bored for the last two months, she was not afraid of boredom now; and thus, without being able to guess any part of it, Julien had lost his greatest advantage.

I've given myself a master! Mademoiselle de La Mole said to herself, deep in the blackest despondency. Fortunately, he's a man of honor, but if I do anything to injure his vanity, he'll avenge himself by revealing the nature of our relations. Mathilde had never had a lover before, and at this point in a person's life, when even the harshest of temperaments indulge in some tender illusions, she was in the grip of supremely bitter thoughts.

He has enormous power over me, because he reigns by means of terror, and he can inflict horrible punishments on me if I push him to it. This thought was enough to impel Mademoiselle de La Mole to insult him. Courage was the core element in her character. Nothing could get her wound up more, and nothing could more quickly cure her boredom, than the idea that her entire existence could depend on the toss of a coin.

On the third day, when Mademoiselle de La Mole stubbornly continued to avoid looking at him, Julien followed her after dinner and, though it clearly irritated her, into the billiard room.

"Well, Monsieur, you must think you've gotten some pretty powerful rights over me," she said to him with barely concealed anger, "since you insist on speaking to me even though I've made it perfectly clear I do not want you to . . . Do you realize there's not another person in the world who would dare to do so?"

Nothing was ever quite as amusing as the dialogue between these two lovers; without knowing it themselves, they were animated by the most vigorous

hatred for each other. Since neither of them was endowed with a patient nature, and since, moreover, they were both well accustomed to the ways of high society, they soon reached the point of declaring outright that they were breaking off the relationship for good.

“I swear to you that I’ll keep this secret eternally,” said Julien, “and I’d add that I would never address a single word to you in the future if it weren’t for the fact that it would be noticed and might reflect badly on your reputation.” He bowed respectfully to her, and he took his leave.

It had not been so difficult, carrying out this act he saw as a duty; he was far from believing he was in love with Mademoiselle de La Mole. Certainly he did not love her three days ago, when he was hidden in the big mahogany armoire. But his was the kind of nature that changes swiftly, and did so now, beginning with the very moment he parted from her.

His memory cruelly began to go back over the smallest details of that night, which had, in fact, left him cold at the time.

And on that same night following the declaration of their permanent separation, Julien felt he was almost going to go mad when he had to admit to himself that he actually did love Mademoiselle de La Mole.

Fierce internal combats followed upon that discovery; all his feelings were suddenly turned upside down.

Two days later, instead of feeling superior to Monsieur de Croisenois, he almost wanted to embrace him and burst into tears.

His continued misery finally led him to a sensible idea, and he decided he would take the trip to Languedoc after all; he packed his trunk and had it hauled to the station.

He thought he might faint when, arriving at the mail coach station, he was told that by a stroke of unusual good luck, there was an open seat on the Toulouse coach for the next day. He made a reservation and returned to the Hôtel de La Mole to inform the marquis about his departure.

Monsieur de La Mole had gone out. More dead than alive, Julien went to wait in the library. Who should he meet there, but Mademoiselle de La Mole?

When she saw him, her expression was so cruel that he could not possibly misinterpret it.

Carried away by his grief, and thrown off by surprise at seeing her there, Julien weakened enough to say to her, in the gentlest of voices, directly from his heart, "So you don't love me anymore?"

"I'm disgusted with myself for having given myself to the first man who showed up," said Mathilde, weeping with rage despite herself.

"*The first man who showed up!*" cried Julien, and he rushed over to an old, medieval sword that had been kept in the library as a curiosity.

His sorrow, which he thought had been at its peak when he asked that question of Mademoiselle de La Mole, now was increased a hundredfold at the sight of her shedding tears of shame. Killing her would have made him the happiest of men.

When he drew the sword, with some difficulty, out of its antique sheath, Mathilde, happy to be experiencing a new sensation, came proudly up to him; her tears were all dried now.

The thought of the Marquis de La Mole, his benefactor, suddenly came vividly to Julien's mind. I'd be killing his daughter! he said to himself. How horrible! He made as if to throw the sword away. No doubt, he thought, she'll get a good laugh out of this bit of melodrama. That thought gave him back his self-composure. He looked down at the blade of the sword with curiosity, as if he were examining it for a spot of rust, and he then put it back in its sheath; with perfect calm, he hung it back up on the gilt bronze nail that supported it.

The whole incident, which slowed down a great deal at the end, had only lasted a minute. Mademoiselle de La Mole looked at him with astonishment. So I was almost going to be killed by my lover! she said to herself.

The thought took her back to the great times, the century of Charles IX and Henri III.

She stood, motionless, in front of Julien, who had just replaced the sword; she looked at him with eyes in which there was no longer any trace of hatred. We must admit that at this particular moment she was exceedingly attractive;

at any rate, no woman had ever less resembled a Parisian doll. (That was, we recall, the term Julien liked to use to express his objection to the women of the city.)

I'm going to slip right back into my weakness for him, thought Mathilde. But then he'll think he's my lord and master, after a relapse, and just when I've spoken so sternly to him! She fled.

My God, she's beautiful! Julien said as he watched her run away: and that's the same creature who flung herself into my arms with such intensity less than a week ago . . . and a moment like that will never come again! And it's all my fault! And at that moment, that extraordinary moment, that moment that could have meant so much to my future, I wasn't even alive to it! . . . I might as well admit it: right from my birth I've been a dull, wretched kind of person.

The marquis appeared; Julien hastened to inform him of his plan to depart.

"Where are you going?" asked Monsieur de La Mole.

"Languedoc."

"No. If you please, you're reserved for a higher destiny than that. If you go anywhere, it'll be to the North . . . So, to use military terms, I'm confining you to barracks. You will, please, arrange things so that you're never absent for more than two or three hours. I might need you at any moment."

Julien bowed and retired without a word, which left the marquis quite surprised; Julien was incapable of speaking, so he went and locked himself in his room. There, he was free to indulge in the most exaggerated visions of his hideous fate.

And so, he sighed, I'm not even allowed to leave! God knows how many days the marquis will keep me here in Paris. Great God! What will become of me? And not a friend I can confer with: Father Pirard wouldn't even let me finish my first sentence, and Comte Altamira would just try to get me to sign up for some conspiracy.

But I'm going out of my mind. I can feel it: I'm going mad!

Who can I turn to? What will become of me?

## CRUEL MOMENTS

*And she admits it to me! She tells me even the  
smallest details! Those beautiful eyes of hers, when  
fixed on mine reveal the love she feels for another!*

SCHILLER<sup>133</sup>

Mademoiselle de La Mole, in raptures, could think of nothing but the glory of having been on the point of being killed. She went so far as to say: he's worthy to be my master, since he was on the point of killing me. Ah, how many young men of fashion would you have to combine to arrive at such an impassioned moment?

She had to admit that he had been terribly attractive when he got up on the chair to replace the sword, in that picturesque location the decorator had chosen for it! I wasn't so crazy to fall in love with him after all.

At that moment, if any respectable method had presented itself for renewing their relationship, she would have seized on it with pleasure. Julien, up in his room behind the double-locked door, was racked with violent despair. In his maddest moments, he considered going and throwing himself at her feet. If, instead of staying locked away from everyone, he had taken a walk through the garden or around the house, he might have, in an instant, changed his horrible misery into pure happiness.

But the skill in such things that he lacked, and for which we reproach him, would have also kept him from indulging the sublime impulse of snatching up that sword, which rendered him so handsome in the eyes of Mademoiselle de La Mole. That caprice turned out to be so favorable to Julien, and the spell of it lasted the whole day: Mathilde formed a charming mental image of the short moments in which she had loved him, and she felt regret.

In fact, she told herself, as far as that poor boy knows, my passion for him only lasted from one o'clock in the morning, when I saw him come up the ladder to my room, his pistols in his pockets, until eight in the morning. It was at 8:15, during Mass at Sainte-Valère,<sup>134</sup> that I first thought he might believe he'd become my master, and that he might try to terrorize me into obeying him.

After dinner, Mademoiselle de La Mole, far from avoiding Julien, spoke to him and almost commanded him to follow her into the garden; he obeyed. This turned into a trial that he could have done without. Mathilde, without knowing it, was yielding to the rebirth of the love she felt for him. She found an extreme pleasure in walking beside him; she gazed down with curiosity at those hands of his that, earlier that morning, had seized a sword to kill her.

After an act like that, and after all that had passed between them, there could be no return to their earlier modes of conversation.

Bit by bit, Mathilde began to speak openly to him about matters of the heart. She found a strange voluptuous pleasure in this kind of talk, as she slowly started telling him the details of the passing enthusiasms she had felt for Monsieur de Croisenois, for Monsieur de Caylus . . .

"What! For Monsieur de Caylus too!" cried Julien, and all the embittered jealousy of a rejected lover burst out with those words. Mathilde understood and was not at all offended.

She continued to torture Julien, detailing for him her past feelings in the most picturesque language, and in all the sincerity of intimate truth. He could tell that what she was describing was something she was vividly reliving now. He had the added pain of seeing that as she spoke, she was making discoveries about her own heart.

The misery of jealousy reached its peak with this.

To suspect that one's rival is loved is already cruelty enough, but to hear the woman one loves confessing it in such detail must be the very worst of sufferings.

And now, oh, how severe was the punishment for those moments of pridefulness Julien had had, when he believed he was favored over the likes of de



Caylus or de Croisenois! And how intimate, how heartfelt the grief with which he now exaggerated to himself even the least of their good qualities! And how sincerely and utterly he now despised himself!

In his eyes, Mathilde seemed worthy of adoration; words are too feeble to express the excesses of his admiration. Walking beside her, he looked down surreptitiously at her hands, her arms, her regal bearing. He was ready to fall down at her feet, almost dead with love and grief, and to cry out: Have pity!

And this woman, so beautiful, so superior in every way, this woman who loved me once, will no doubt soon be in love with Monsieur de Caylus!

Julien had no doubt of Mademoiselle de La Mole's sincerity; the accent of truth was audible in everything she was saying. So that there would be nothing lacking in his misery, there were moments when, as she concentrated on describing how she once felt about Monsieur de Caylus, she spoke about him as if she loved him now. There was obviously love in her tone of voice; Julien could hear it clearly.

If someone had poured molten lead into his chest cavity, he would have suffered less. How could the poor boy, having attained this pitch of pain and suffering, possibly guess that it was because she was talking to him that Mademoiselle de La Mole was finding such pleasure in recalling those vague imaginings of love she had once felt for a Monsieur de Caylus or a Monsieur de Luz?

No words could express the tortures Julien felt. He was listening to a detailed narration of a love felt for others, and in that same pathway bordered with lime trees where, just a few days ago, he had stood and waited for one o'clock to sound in order to go up into her room. No human being can endure a worse torment.

And this new mode of cruel intimacy went on for another long week. Sometimes Mathilde seemed to seek him out; other times she seemed merely not avoiding a chance to talk to him. And the subject of the conversation, to which they both seemed to revert with a kind of cruel sensual pleasure, was the narrative of the feelings she had felt for others; she told him about the letters she had written, remembering even the very words she had used. In the last days

she seemed to contemplate Julien with a kind of malignant joy. His sorrows were a source of pleasure to her; they represented to her the weakness of her tyrant, as a result of which she could allow herself to love him.<sup>135</sup>

The reader can see that Julien had no experience of life; he had not even read novels. If he had been a little less awkward, if he had been able to say, with some degree of calm assurance, to this young woman whom he so adored, and who was telling him such bizarre things, Let's admit that I am not the equal of all those other gentlemen, but for all that, I happen to be the one you love . . .

If he had said something like that, perhaps she would have been relieved to have had her secret truth divined; at least his success would have hinged on how elegantly he had been able to express the point, and of course on the moment he chose for expressing it. In any case, he was beginning to come out of the ordeal well enough, with some advantage to himself, for the ongoing situation had begun to feel monotonous to Mathilde.

"But you don't love me anymore, and I adore you!" he blurted out one day, hopeless with love and misery. This was almost the stupidest thing he could possibly have said.

Saying it destroyed, in the blink of an eye, all the pleasure that Mademoiselle de La Mole had been taking in describing the state of her heart. She was starting to be surprised that, after all that had passed, he wasn't taking offense at her stories. She had gone so far as to imagine, just before he blurted out that idiotic statement, that perhaps he no longer loved her. His pride must have extinguished his love, she said to herself. He's not the kind of man to tolerate seeing the likes of Caylus, de Luz, Croisenois preferred to him, particularly since he's admitted they're superior to him. No, I won't see him at my feet ever again!

On some of the preceding days, in his ingenuous misery, Julien had sincerely sung the praises of those gentlemen and their sterling qualities; indeed, he actually exaggerated them. This nuance was not lost on Mademoiselle de La Mole. It astonished her, but she did not understand what underlay it. Julien's desperate soul had him praising the rival he believed to be loved out of empathy with the man's happiness.

But now his outburst, so frank but so stupid, changed everything in an instant; Mathilde, sure of being loved, despised him utterly.

When he let that inept sentiment slip out, she was walking along with him; now she left him, and her face expressed the profoundest contempt. Back in the drawing room, for the rest of the evening she did not even look at him. The next day, this contempt swelled up and filled her whole heart. There was no longer any question of the impulse that, for the last week, had led her to treat Julien like her most intimate acquaintance; now the very sight of him displeased her. Mathilde's sensation reached the point of disgust. Nothing could express the excess of contempt she felt whenever she happened to catch sight of him.

Julien understood nothing whatever of what had been going on in Mathilde's heart over the preceding week, but he certainly recognized and understood the contempt. He had the good sense to keep out of her sight as much as possible, and never to look at her.

But depriving himself of her presence was mortally painful. Her absence, he believed, was actually worsening his suffering. Even a courageous man's heart can't endure this, he said to himself. He spent all his time up in the attic, at a little window. The shutters were carefully closed, and from there he could make out Mademoiselle de La Mole whenever she appeared in the garden.

What must have been his feelings when after dinner he saw her walking there with Monsieur de Caylus, Monsieur de Luz, or one of the others for whom she had felt some fluttering of attraction in the past?

Julien never knew misery could be this intense; he nearly cried out at times. That strong spirit of his was thrown into utter disarray.

Thinking of anything but Mademoiselle de La Mole had become odious to him; he became incapable of writing the simplest letters.

"You've gone mad," said the marquis.

Julien, trembling with fear at being found out, claimed he was ill, and he managed to make himself convincing. Fortunately for him, the marquis began jesting with him at dinner concerning his upcoming journey; Mathilde inferred that it would be a long one. Julien had already for several days fled from her

sight, and the young, brilliant people who had everything this pale, somber creature she once loved was lacking, could not seem to rouse her out of her reverie.

An ordinary girl, she said to herself, would have sought out her preferred man from the young ones who attract everyone's admiring gazes in the drawing rooms. But one of the hallmarks of genius is its refusal to follow in the tracks of the vulgar.

Being the partner of a man like Julien, who only lacks wealth, which I have, I would continue to be the center of people's attention; I would by no means pass through life unnoticed. And far from living in fear of a new revolution, like my cousins, who so fear the people that they dare not scold some postilion who drives them about badly, I would be sure to play a role, and a great role, because the man I've chosen has both character and an ambition that knows no bounds. What does he lack? Friends, money? I'll give them to him. But in her thinking, she was still inclined to view Julien as an inferior, who can be ordered to love when it's convenient.

## 19

# OPERA BOUFFE

*Oh, how this spring of love resembleth  
The uncertain glory of an April day;  
Which now shows all the beauty of the sun,  
And by and by a cloud takes all away!*

SHAKESPEARE<sup>136</sup>

Thinking about the future and the exceptional role she expected to play, Marthilde soon came almost to regret the rather dry and metaphysical discussions she had often had with Julien. Feeling tired of such lofty thoughts, she also

sometimes missed the moments of happiness she had found when she was with him; memories like those were not without remorse, though, and at times she felt overwhelmed by it.

But if one must have a weakness, she said to herself, a girl of my stature should only forget her duties for a man of merit; no one should ever say that it was a handsome mustache or an elegant bearing on horseback that seduced me, but rather profound discussions with him on the future of France, on his thoughts about whether the events about to break upon us will be comparable to the Revolution of 1688 in England.<sup>137</sup> I've been seduced, she said, as if in dialogue with her remorse, and I am a weak woman, but at least I haven't been led astray like some mindless doll by a handsome exterior.

And if there is to be a revolution, why couldn't Julien Sorel play a role like that of Roland, and I that of Madame Roland?<sup>138</sup> I'd much rather be like her than Madame de Staël: immoral behavior like hers will be a detriment in our century. Certainly, no one will ever be able to reproach me for a second weakness; I'd die of shame.<sup>139</sup>

But we must admit that not all of Mathilde's reveries were of quite so solemn a character as the thoughts we have just transcribed.

She observed Julien, finding a charm and grace in even his smallest actions. There's no doubt, she said to herself, that I've managed to eliminate any thought he might have had about having rights over me.

That voice of deep misery and profound love in which the poor boy declared his love last week—that proves it. I suppose it really was eccentric of me to take such offense at a statement so steeped in respect and passion. After all, I am his wife, aren't I? And what he said was perfectly natural and, I have to admit it, very pleasant. Julien still loved me even after those endless conversations in which I spoke to him, with a great deal of cruelty, true, of all the little love impulses that my boring life inspired in me for those fashionable young men he's so jealous of. Oh, if he only knew how little danger they pose! And how faded and dull they seem to me compared with him—all of them perfect copies of each other.

As she reflected thus, Mathilde was absentmindedly drawing lines with a

pencil on a page in her album. She was startled and delighted to see that she had, unknowingly, traced a profile with a striking resemblance to Julien. The voice of heaven is speaking to me! This is one of love's miracles, she exclaimed to herself rapturously. Without meaning to, I've made a portrait of him.

She fled into her bedroom and locked herself in; she set to work in earnest, trying to make a portrait of Julien, but no matter what she did, she could not make it come out; the profile she had made unconsciously was invariably a better likeness. She was enchanted; she saw it as proving the truth of her grand passion.

She did not put her album down until late, when the marquise summoned her to take her to the Italian opera. She had but one goal: to seek out Julien and get her mother to invite him along.

But he was nowhere to be seen; the ladies had only ordinary mortals in their box. During the whole first act of the opera, Mathilde fantasized about the man she loved, feeling gusts of passion sweep through her. But in the second act, a love maxim—set, in truth, to a melody worthy of Cimarosa—was sung, and it penetrated right to her heart. The heroine was saying, I must be punished for the excessive adoration I feel for him. I love him too much!

From the moment she heard this sublime cantilena, all the rest of the world vanished for Mathilde. She was spoken to, but she did not reply; her mother scolded her, but she could barely bring herself even to look at her. Her ecstasy reached a level of exaltation and passion so powerful that it was comparable to those violent feelings Julien had had for her over the last few days. The cantilena melody, so full of divine grace, to which was sung the maxim that she felt was so perfectly suited to her own situation, filled up every moment in which she was not thinking of Julien. Thanks to her love of music, on this evening she was in the emotional state that Madame de Rênal was always in when thinking of him. A mental love, a love born of thinking, is more a matter of cleverness than of real love, but even it has its moments of enthusiasm. It knows itself too well and constantly judges itself; far from evading thought, it is constructed entirely of thought.

On the way home, despite anything Madame de La Mole might say, Mathilde claimed to feel feverish, and she passed much of the night playing the cantilena's melody on her piano. She sang the lyrics of the famous air that had so charmed her:

*Devo punirami, devo punirami,  
Se troppo amai, etc.*<sup>140</sup>

As a result of this night of passionate madness, she believed she had managed to triumph over her love. (This page will do damage to the unfortunate author in more ways than one. Hard, cold hearts will accuse him of indecency. But the author has not the slightest intention of insulting the splendid young people who gather in the drawing rooms of Paris by implying that even a single one of them could ever share in the wild impulses that so deface the character of Mathilde. This person is strictly an imaginary figure, one who is, moreover, imagined as quite separated from the social customs that, as the centuries progress, will assuredly earn the civilization of the nineteenth century a most distinguished ranking.

Certainly it is not prudence that is lacking in the young ladies who ornament all the balls this winter season.

Likewise, I do not believe anyone can accuse them of overly despising a great fortune, horses, beautiful estates, and all the other things that assure one a pleasant place in society. No, indeed, far from finding all those advantages a bore, they instead make them into the most faithfully desired objects in life, and if there is any passion to be found, it is passion for acquiring them.

Nor is it love that drives the success of young men endowed with some talent, like Julien; rather, they get themselves closely connected to a particular social set, and when that set comes into its own, all the good things in society rain down upon them. Woe to the thoughtful man who fails to belong to some set, for even his minor successes, uncertain though they be, will be held against him, and higher virtue will step in to triumph over him—by robbing him. Look, Monsieur, a novel is a mirror being carried along a main road. Sometimes it re-

flects an azure sky, and sometimes the puddles of mud that form along the road. And the man who's carrying this mirror in his sack, you accuse him of being immoral! His mirror shows you the mud, and you accuse the mirror! Maybe you ought to accuse the road with the mud puddles on it, or better yet the road inspector who lets the water pool up and the mud form.

Very well. Now that we all understand that a character like Mathilde is impossible in our time, an era as prudent as it is virtuous, I'm less worried that I'll annoy you all if I continue to narrate the follies of this pleasant girl.)

All the next day, she was on the alert for any opportunity to prove she had conquered her mad passion. Her main aim was to displease Julien any way she could, but she could not come across him.

Julien was too miserable and above all too agitated to be able to discern what was behind the complex maneuvers of her passion, much less deduce that there might be something favorable to him in it all: he was simply the victim; his sufferings had perhaps never been this extreme. His actions were so little under his rational control that if some bitter philosopher had said to him, "Try to take advantage right now of her disposition, which is currently in your favor; when it comes to this sort of intellectual love that we find in Paris, you won't find a lover behaving the same way two days in a row"—if he had been told this, he wouldn't have understood. To try to get some advice, to describe his torments to the first person to come along would have been a happiness comparable to that of some wretch who, making his way across a burning desert, is suddenly given a drink of cold water from heaven. He knew the peril, though, and he feared that if some indiscreet person would have questioned him, he would respond with a stream of tears; he locked himself in his room.

He watched Mathilde take a long stroll in the garden; when she had finally left, he went down, and he went up to a rose bush from which she had taken a flower.

The night was a dark one, so he could let himself feel all his misery without being observed. It was clear that Mademoiselle de La Mole loved one of those young officers with whom he had just observed her gaily chatting. She had loved him, but she had come to see how little he was worth.



And I really am worthless! Julien said to himself with full conviction. I am nothing but a dull, common creature, a bore to others and intolerable to myself. He was mortally disgusted by all his good qualities, and by all the things he had once enjoyed with enthusiasm; and in this mental state of *inverted imagination*, he was now trying to weigh and sift life by using his imagination. This is the kind of error a superior man will make.

The idea of suicide occurred to him frequently now; the image had such charm, like a delicious state of repose, like the glass of cold water offered to the wretch in the desert, dying of thirst and heat.

My death will only make me more contemptible in her eyes! he cried. What a memory I'll leave behind!

Having fallen into the lowest abyss of misery, a human being has no resource left except for courage. Julien didn't have the kind of genius to say to himself, I must dare it, but as he looked up at Mathilde's window, he saw through the shutters that she was putting out the light, and he pictured again that room he had only seen, alas, once, just one time in his entire life. His imagination went no further than that.

One o'clock struck. The time elapsed between hearing the clock striking and saying, I'm going to take the ladder and climb up, was only an instant.

This was a flash of genius; good reasons came crowding in at once. Could I be any more miserable? he asked himself. He ran off to get the ladder but found that the gardener had chained it. With the help of the hammer from one of his pistols, which broke, Julien—animated in this moment by a super-human strength—twisted open one of the links of the chain around the ladder; in minutes he had the ladder free, and he placed it up against Mathilde's window.

She'll be angry, she'll pour all her contempt on me, but so what? I'll give her one kiss, one last kiss, and then I'll go back up to my room and kill myself . . . but my lips will touch her cheek once more before I die!

He flew up the ladder and knocked on the shutter; after a few seconds, Mathilde heard, and she tried to open the shutter; the ladder was leaned up against it; Julien hung on to the iron hook that was meant to hold the shutter open and,

at the risk of falling many times over, he gave the ladder a violent shaking, which moved it over just enough. Mathilde could open the shutter.

He threw himself into the room, more dead than alive. "So it's you!" she exclaimed, flinging herself into his arms . . .



How could words begin to describe Julien's happiness? And that of Mathilde was almost as extreme.

She spoke to him against herself, accusing herself.

"Punish me for my terrible pride," she said to him, holding him so tightly in her arms that he could scarcely breathe. "You are my master, and I am your slave. I need to go down on my knees to beg your forgiveness for trying to rebel against you." She threw herself down at his feet. "Yes, you're my master" she repeated, drunk with happiness and with love. "Reign forever over me, and punish your slave severely when she tries to rebel."

A moment later she tore herself out of his arms, lit a candle, and Julien then had all he could do to keep her from cutting off all the hair on one side of her head.

"I want a constant reminder," she said, "that I'm your servant; if ever some disgusting pride leads me astray, show me this hair and say, 'this is not a matter of love, nor a matter of anything you might be feeling right now: you've sworn to obey, so now, on your honor, obey!'"

But it's wiser to suppress any further description of such an extreme moment of abandonment and happiness.

Julien's virtue was on a level with his happiness. "I need to go back down the ladder," he said to Mathilde when he saw the first light of dawn breaking over the distant chimneys to the east, beyond the gardens. "The sacrifice I'm imposing on myself is worthy of you. I'm depriving myself of several hours of the greatest happiness the human heart can experience, but it's a sacrifice made with an eye to your reputation. If you knew my heart, you'd know how violently I'm forcing myself to go. Will you always be, for me, exactly what you

are at this moment? But honor demands it, and that's enough. I must tell you that since our first meeting like this, not all the suspicions concerned burglars. Monsieur de La Mole had a man keep watch in the garden. Monsieur de Croisenois is surrounded by spies, and everything he does at night is reported . . .”

Mathilde burst into laughter at this. “Oh, the poor boy!” she exclaimed.<sup>141</sup> Her mother and one of the chambermaids were awakened; suddenly they were calling to her through the door. Julien watched her turn pale as she scolded the maid; she did not condescend to reply to her mother.

“If they think to look out the window, they’ll see the ladder!” Julien said to her.

He took her in his arms one last time, then leapt onto the ladder and slid, rather than climbed, down to the bottom; in a second he was on the ground.

And three seconds later, the ladder was back under the lime trees, and Mathilde’s honor was intact. When Julien came back to his senses, he realized that he was bleeding a great deal, and that he was half naked; he had cut himself sliding down the ladder.

His extreme joy had restored all the natural energy of his character: twenty men could have set upon him now, and attacking them all on his own would have been just one pleasure the more. But fortunately, his fighting valor was not put to the test; he returned the ladder to its proper location and replaced the chain around it; he did not omit smoothing out the imprint that the ladder had left in the bed of exotic flowers below Mathilde’s window.

As he was smoothing the earth in the darkness with his hand to be sure the marks were entirely gone, he felt something falling onto his hands: it was the hair from one side of Mathilde’s head; she had cut it off and tossed it down to him.

She was at her window.

“See what your servant gives you,” she said, quite out loud. “It’s the sign of her eternal obedience. I renounce the use of my own reason. Be my master.”

This had such an impact on Julien that he was on the point of going back for the ladder and climbing back up to her. But his reason, at last, prevailed.

Getting back into the house from the garden was not easy. He succeeded

in forcing open a cellar window; once he was back inside, he had to break open the door to his own room as quietly as possible. In his rush to get down from Mathilde's room, he had left everything behind, including his key, which was in the pocket of his jacket. If only, he said to himself, she remembers to hide away all those mortal remains!

Finally, fatigue won out over bliss, and as the sun rose, he drifted off into a deep sleep.

The bell for luncheon rang, and he got up, not without difficulty, and came down to the dining room. Mathilde entered soon after. Julien's pride basked for a moment in joy, observing the love he saw in the eyes of this girl, so beautiful and so universally praised; but abruptly his prudence saw cause for alarm.

Using the excuse that she had not had time to style her hair properly, Mathilde had arranged it so that Julien could see at once the whole extent of the sacrifice she had made for him the night before. If an appearance as lovely as hers could have been spoiled by anything, Mathilde would have succeeded in spoiling it: one whole side of her gorgeous head of ash-blond hair had been chopped off unevenly, down to about half an inch from her scalp.

At luncheon, Mathilde's whole manner seemed to echo this original rash action. You would have thought she was trying to make everyone see the insane passion she felt for Julien. Fortunately, on that day both the Marquis and the Marquise de La Mole were focused on a set of blue sashes to be awarded, and Monsieur de Chaulnes had been left off the list.<sup>142</sup> Toward the end of the meal, Mathilde addressed Julien, calling him *my master*. Julien blushed to the whites of his eyes.

Whether it was simply by accident, or by a deliberate scheme on the part of Madame de La Mole, Mathilde was not to be found alone for even a moment all that day. But that evening, as they passed each other on their way from the dining room to the drawing room, she managed just a moment to say to Lucien:

"All my plans have been undone.<sup>143</sup> You mustn't think that this is my doing; Mama has just decided that one of her maids will be sleeping in my room."

The day passed by like lightning; Julien had never been happier. At seven the next morning, he stationed himself in the library; he hoped Mademoiselle de La Mole would put in an appearance there too. He had written her an endless letter.

But he didn't see her until hours later, at luncheon. Today her hair was done with the greatest of care; some marvelous artifice had managed to conceal the place where she had cut off her hair. She looked at Julien once or twice, but her expression remained polite and calm; there was no question of her calling him *my master*.

Julien was so astonished he could scarcely breathe . . . Mathilde now reproached herself for practically everything she had done for him.

Upon mature reflection, she had decided that he was a creature who, if not entirely common, certainly was not exceptional enough to deserve all the wild things she had dared to do for him. In short, she thought no more about love; she was, that day, bored with love.

As for Julien, his emotions were as dramatic as those of a sixteen-year-old boy. Hideous doubt, astonishment, despair each took him over in succession in the course of this luncheon, which seemed to him as if it would never end.

The moment he could politely get up from the table, he flew rather than ran to the stables, saddled his horse himself, and took off at a gallop. He was afraid he might disgrace himself by committing some act of weakness. I've got to numb my heart, wear it out with physical exercise, he said to himself as he galloped through the forest at Meudon. What have I done, what have I said to deserve a disgrace like this?

I mustn't do anything, say anything today, he thought as returned to the house. I must be as dead physically as I am in my soul. Julien is dead; it's only his corpse, still trembling.

## A JAPANESE VASE

*At first, his heart doesn't realize how bad things are; he's more troubled than moved. But as his reason returns to life, he feels the depth of his misery. All life's pleasures are nothing to him; he feels only the sharp stings of despair tearing at him. But why talk about physical pain? What pain that the body can suffer is comparable to this?*

JEAN-PAUL<sup>144</sup>

The bell rang for dinner; Julien had barely time to dress. He found Mathilde in the drawing room, imploring her brother and Monsieur de Croisenois not to go and spend that evening at Suresnes, with the Maréchale de Fervaques.

It would have been difficult to be any more attractive and friendly to them. After dinner, Messieurs de Luz, de Caylus, and a number of their friends arrived. An observer would have thought that Mademoiselle de La Mole had returned, with sisterly affection, both to her social set and to all the strictest social conventions as well. Even though it was a lovely evening, she insisted that they not go out to the garden; she wanted to stay close to the armchair where Madame de La Mole was seated. The blue sofa was again the center of the group, as it had been during the winter.

Mathilde felt a dislike for the garden, or at any rate it seemed perfectly boring to her: the place was too closely connected to the memory of Julien.

Feeling miserable diminishes one's wit. Our hero had the bad judgment to take his usual place in the little wicker chair that had seen so many brilliant triumphs in the past. Today, no one said a word to him; his presence was ignored, or worse. Those among the friends of Mademoiselle de La Mole who were sitting near him on one end of the sofa deliberately turned their backs to him, or at least he thought they did.

I'm like a courtier who's fallen from favor, he thought. He decided he would study the people who were trying to crush him with their disdain.

The uncle of Monsieur de Luz held an important post with the king, and so it was that this splendid officer began his conversation the same way with every new arrival, telling each one about a fascinating fact: his uncle had gone off at seven to Saint-Cloud, and he planned to spend the night there.<sup>145</sup> This little fact was trotted out as if quite casually, but trotted out it was, every time.

Observing Monsieur de Croisenois with the stern eye of a man in misery, Julien noticed the exceptional influence that this pleasant, good young man attributed to occult causes. It went so far that he would become saddened or annoyed if he heard someone explaining some significant event in terms of purely natural causes. There's a touch of insanity there, Julien said to himself. He has a character very much like that of the Emperor Alexander, as Prince Korasoff described him to me. During his first year in Paris, poor Julien, fresh from the seminary and dazzled by the graceful manners, so new to him, of all these pleasant young people, could only admire them. But now their true character was beginning to take shape in his eyes.

I'm acting an undignified part here, he thought suddenly. He wanted to get up out of his little wicker chair in some smooth manner. He wanted to invent some pretext, but that was asking too much of an imagination that was already fully occupied elsewhere. He had to turn to his memory, but his was, we must admit, not exactly rich in resources of this sort; the poor boy was still so awkward, so unskilled in social graces, that when he did get up he did it in such a gauche manner that practically everyone in the room noticed it. His misery was all too evident in everything about him. For the last three-quarters of an hour he had been playing the role of a tiresome subordinate, the sort for whom no one takes the trouble of concealing what they think of him.

But the critical observations he had just made on his rivals kept him from viewing his situation as entirely tragic; he could prop up his pride somewhat with the memory of what had happened the night before last. They may have their advantages over me, he thought as he walked alone in the garden, but

Mathilde has never been even once to any of them what she's deigned to be twice to me.

His wisdom carried him no further than that. He was utterly unable to understand the character of the unique woman whom chance had made the absolute mistress of his happiness.

He spent the next day exhausting himself and riding his horse almost to death. In the evening he kept away from the blue sofa, to which Mathilde remained faithful. He noticed that Comte Norbert did not even look at him when he encountered him in the house. It must take a violent effort on his part, he thought, being such a naturally civil person.

For Julien, sleeping would have been his only happiness. But despite his physical exhaustion, his imagination was overrun with all too seductive memories. He wasn't clever enough to realize that by taking his lengthy horseback rides through the forests all around Paris, which had an impact only on him and not at all on the heart or mind of Mathilde, he was leaving his fate up to chance.

He felt the only thing that could bring true solace for his suffering would be the chance to talk with Mathilde. But what would he dare to say?

That was what he was deep in thought about one morning at seven in the library, when all of a sudden he saw her come in.

"I know, Monsieur, that you wish to speak to me."

"Good God! Who told you that?"

"I know it—what else matters? If you are lacking in honor, you can ruin me, or at least you can try to. But this danger doesn't seem very real, and in any case it won't prevent me from speaking the truth. I no longer love you, Monsieur; my imagination tricked me into it . . ."

This was a terrible blow, and Julien, utterly desperate with love and with suffering, tried to explain himself. Nothing could have been more absurd. Can you explain failing to be loved? But reason was no longer in control of anything he did. Blind instinct was pushing him to slow down the decision she was making concerning his fate. He thought that as long as he kept talking, the real end



had not come. Mathilde paid no attention to what he was saying; the sound of his voice irritated her, and she could scarcely believe he had the audacity to interrupt her like this.

That morning, the twofold remorse arising out of her virtue and out of her pride made her feel especially miserable. She felt annihilated, as it were, by the grotesque idea that she had granted rights over herself to some little abbé, the son of a peasant. It's almost as bad, she said to herself in those moments when she enjoyed exaggerating her unhappiness, as if I could reproach myself for having a weakness for one of the lower servants.

With bold, proud natures like hers, it is only a step from rage against oneself to rage against others. Giving in to fits of fury can actually be a powerful pleasure.

In an instant, Mademoiselle de La Mole reached the point of heaping upon Julien all the most excessive expressions of contempt. She had an infinite cleverness, and that wit triumphed in the art of torturing other people's self-esteem, and of inflicting the cruelest wounds.

For the first time in his life, Julien found himself subjected to an onslaught from a superior intelligence animated by violent hatred of him. Far from imagining some sort of self-defense, he succumbed and despised himself. As he heard her cruel expressions of disgust, calculated so brilliantly to destroy every single good opinion he had ever had of himself, he thought Mathilde was right and indeed that she didn't go far enough.

On her side, she felt a delicious, prideful pleasure in punishing both herself and him for the adoration she had felt a few days ago.

She didn't have to invent or think through the cruel things she was saying to him now with such complacency. She was only repeating what for the last week the counsel for the case against love had been declaiming in her heart.

Every word multiplied the horrible pain for Julien. He wanted to flee, but Mademoiselle de La Mole held him by the arm with a sense of authority.

"Please consider," he said to her, "that you're speaking quite loudly, and they may be able to hear you in the next room."

“What do I care!” exclaimed Mademoiselle de La Mole with arrogance. “Who dares to tell me I can be heard? I intend to remove once and for all any ideas you and your pathetic little self-love might have formed about me.”

When Julien was finally able to get out of the library, he was so astonished that his suffering was actually lessened. Well! She doesn’t love me anymore, he kept repeating aloud, as if trying to understand the situation. Apparently she did love me for a week or ten days, whereas I’ll love her for the rest of my life.

Is this really possible? Just a few days ago, she meant nothing to me, nothing at all!

Mathilde felt an orgasmic burst of pride flooding her heart; she’d been able to break it off, once and for all! Such a total triumph over such a strong attraction left her perfectly happy. And so that little gentleman knows, and he knows it thoroughly, that he has no and never will have any influence over me. She was as wildly happy as if she were actually in love at the moment.

After such a horrible, humiliating scene, anyone less passionate than Julien would have found love impossible. Without straying so much as an inch from what she owed herself, Mademoiselle de La Mole had told him some ugly things, but so well calculated that they could continue to seem perfectly correct even when recalled later in a cool moment.

The conclusion Julien drew at first from this astonishing scene was that Mathilde had a pride of infinite proportions. He firmly believed that everything was over between them, but at luncheon the next day, he remained awkward and timid around her. This was a failing we could not reproach him for at any previous time. In small and bigger matters, he knew clearly what he ought to do and what he wanted to do, and he did it.

That day, following the luncheon, when Madame de La Mole asked him for a seditious and very rare pamphlet that her priest had brought in secretly for her that morning, Julien reached across a side table for it and knocked over an old blue porcelain vase, one of the ugliest things ever made.

Madame de La Mole jumped up and cried out in distress, leaning down better to see the ruins of her beloved vase. “It was an old Japanese one,” she was saying, “and it came to me from my great-aunt the abbess of Chelles; it

had been a present from the Dutch for the Regent Duc d'Orléans, who had given it to his daughter . . .”

Mathilde had followed her mother into the room, delighted to see that the blue vase, which she considered hideous, was broken to bits. Julien was silent, and not overly troubled; he saw Mademoiselle de La Mole standing close by him.

“This vase,” he said to her, “is utterly destroyed, just like the feeling that had once held mastery over my heart. I beg you to accept my apologies for all the follies it has led me into,” and with that he left.

As he was leaving, Madame de La Mole said, “Really, one would think this Monsieur Sorel is actually proud and happy about what he’s done.”

The phrasing fell like a heavy weight on Mathilde’s heart. It’s true, she said to herself, and my mother has guessed right—that’s exactly how he does feel. And at once the joy she had felt about her scene with him the day before evaporated completely. Well then, it’s all over, she thought, apparently feeling calm. This will be a powerful example for me; my mistake was hideous, humiliating! It will make me wiser and more cautious for the rest of my life.

Did I speak the truth? wondered Julien. Why does the love I felt for that insane girl continue to torment me?

That love, far from being extinguished, as he hoped, was actually making rapid strides. She’s mad, true, he was thinking, but does that make her any less adorable? Could it be possible to be any prettier? If you took everything civilization has devised to create the keenest pleasures, wouldn’t you find them all combined, and combined to perfection, in Mademoiselle de La Mole? His memories of happy moments flooded over Julien, rapidly engulfing anything reason tried to erect.

Reason struggles in vain against memories of this kind, and all its stern efforts only end up heightening their enchantment.

Twenty-four hours after the breaking of the old Japanese vase, Julien was decidedly one of the unhappiest of men.

# THE SECRET NOTE

*For everything that I've described, I've seen; and  
though I might have been deceived when I saw it,  
I'm certainly not deceived when I tell you about it.*

FROM A LETTER TO THE AUTHOR

The marquis called for him. Monsieur de La Mole seemed rejuvenated, and there was a gleam in his eye.<sup>146</sup>

"Let's talk a bit about your power of memory," he said to Julien. "They say it's prodigious! Do you think you could memorize a four-page document and go recite it in, say, London? But it would have to be without altering a single word!"

The marquis was crumpling that day's issue of *La Quotidienne*<sup>147</sup> with some annoyance, and trying, without success, to camouflage his extremely serious mood—a level of seriousness Julien had not seen before, even when they were discussing the Frilair business.

Julien was seasoned enough by now to know that he must appear to be entirely fooled by the lighthearted tone the marquis was putting on.

"This issue of *La Quotidienne* isn't perhaps very entertaining, but if Monsieur le Marquis would permit me, tomorrow morning I would have the honor of reciting the entirety of it to him."

"What—even the ads?"

"Yes indeed, and without missing a single word."

"Can you give me your word on it?" asked the marquis, turning suddenly serious.

"Yes, Monsieur, but the fear of not keeping it would be the only thing that might cause any difficulty to my memory."

"Well, I forgot to ask you about this yesterday. I'm not going to ask you to

swear to me never to repeat what you're about to hear; I know you too well to insult your integrity like that. I've already spoken for you, and I'm going to be taking you to a drawing room where there will be twelve individuals. You will take notes on what each person says.

"But don't worry—this won't be some confused conversation. No, each person will speak in turn, though not in formal speeches," added the marquis, resuming the light but shrewd air that was natural to him. "While we speak, you'll take twenty pages of notes. Then you'll return here with me, and we'll reduce those twenty to four pages. Those will be the four pages that you will recite to me the next morning, instead of this issue of *La Quotidienne*. Soon thereafter, you'll depart. You'll have to go swiftly, in the guise of a young man on a pleasure trip. Your goal will be to go unnoticed by anyone. You will arrive in the presence of a great personage. There, you'll need all your cunning. You'll need to fool all the people around the great man, for among his secretaries, his servants, there are men in the pay of our enemies, men who lie in wait for our agents in order to intercept them. You'll carry with you a letter of recommendation, though it will be of no importance.

"At the moment when His Excellency looks at you, you will take out this watch of mine, which I'm giving you for the trip. Take it now, while we're at it, and give me yours.

"The duke himself will deign to write out, from your dictation, the four pages you've learned by heart.

"When that's completed, but by no means at any time before, you may, if His Excellency questions you, tell him about the meeting you're about to attend.

"Something that might help you from being bored during your journey is knowing that between Paris and the residence of that minister, there will be people who would like nothing better than to fire a shot or two at the abbé Sorel. If that happens, the mission is over, and we face a long wait, because how, my dear friend, would we even learn about your death? Even your zeal won't be enough to get that message to us.

"Now, hurry off and buy yourself a complete new set of clothes," the mar-

quis continued in a serious tone. "You should dress in the style of about two years back. Tonight, you have to look like you don't follow fashion too closely. On the journey, though, you can dress as usual. Does all this surprise you—or does your suspicious mind already guess the reason? Yes, my friend, one of the venerable gentlemen whose opinions you'll be hearing tonight is perfectly capable of passing on information by means of which someone could, some evening, slip some grains of opium or even something worse into your food at some nice inn where you've stopped to eat."

"It would be better," said Julien, "to take an extra thirty leagues, avoiding the direct route. My destination is Rome, I presume . . ."

The marquis took on a haughty, displeased air such as Julien had not seen since Bray-le-Haut.

"You'll learn about that, Monsieur, when I decide it's time to tell you. I don't like questions."

"Oh, I didn't mean to question," said Julien effusively. "I swear to you, Monsieur, I was just thinking out loud, trying to figure out the best route."

"Yes, you seemed miles away. Never forget that an ambassador, even one as young as you, shouldn't appear to be eliciting confidences."

Julien was highly mortified. His self-esteem prompted him to come up with some kind of excuse, but he couldn't think of one.

"Remember too," Monsieur de La Mole continued, "that a person always gets his feelings involved when he learns he's done something foolish."

An hour later, Julien was in the marquis's waiting room dressed like a low-level subordinate, with out-of-date clothes, a cravat of dubious whiteness, and the air of a prig about him.

When the marquis saw him, he burst out laughing, and only then was he sure Julien was the right one for the task.

If this young man lets me down, Monsieur de La Mole said to himself, who else can I trust? And when it comes to such matters, I have to trust someone. My son and his brilliant friends, all of the same type, have enough heart and enough loyalty for ten thousand. If it were a matter of fighting, they'd willingly die on the steps to the throne, because they can manage anything . . . except

what's needed in this situation. I'll be damned if I can imagine any one of them being able to learn four pages by heart and travel a hundred leagues without being found out. Norbert would know how to get himself killed just like his ancestors, but even a conscript knows how to do that . . .

The marquis fell into a deep reverie. Well, if somebody has to get himself killed, he thought with a sigh, maybe this young Sorel will know how to do it just as well as he . . .

Then he said, "Let's get into the carriage," as if dismissing an unpleasant thought.

"Monsieur," Julien said, "while they were fitting me for this suit, I memorized the first page of today's *Quotidienne*."

The marquis took the newspaper, and Julien recited without missing a single word. "Good," said the marquis, acting the diplomat this evening to perfection. "And while we do this, the young man is not paying any attention to what streets we're passing."

They arrived finally and went into a large, dismal-looking drawing room, partly paneled and partly hung with green velvet. In the middle of the room, a sullen servant had just finished setting up a large dining table, which he later transformed into a working table by means of an enormous green cloth, covered with ink stains, a relic from some ministry.<sup>148</sup>

The host was a huge man whose name no one ever uttered. Julien thought he had the face and the speech of someone busy digesting a meal.

At a signal from the marquis, Julien took his place at the lower end of the table. To cover up his feelings of awkwardness, he began sharpening some pens. Out of the corner of his eye, he counted seven people, but Julien was only able to see their backs. Two of them addressed Monsieur de La Mole in a way that suggested they were on an equal level with him; the others all seemed more or less respectful.

A new person entered, without being announced. Odd, thought Julien, the way nobody is announced in this drawing room. Is it a precaution they're taking because of me? Everyone rose to greet the newcomer. He was wearing the same highly distinguished decoration as three of the others. Everyone spoke

quietly. Trying to judge the newcomer, Julien only had his looks and his general manner to go on. He was short, heavy, with a high-colored complexion, a gleam in his eye, and the impassive but brutal facial expression of a wild boar.

Julien's attention was immediately distracted by the arrival of a very different type. This was a very tall man, very thin, wearing three or four waistcoats. His gaze was friendly, his gestures polite.

"He looks a lot like the old bishop of Besançon," thought Julien. The man was clearly of the Church, not more than fifty or fifty-five years old, but no one could have looked more fatherly.

Then came the young bishop of Agde; he seemed startled when, gazing around at the others in the room, his eyes alighted on Julien. He had not spoken a word to him since the ceremony at Bray-le-Haut. His surprised expression embarrassed and annoyed Julien. What is this, he asked himself, and why is it that knowing a man always ends up being a disadvantage to me? All these great lords I've never seen before don't intimidate me in the slightest, but the stare of that young bishop freezes me! No doubt about it—I really am a bizarre, unfortunate kind of creature.

A short, very dark man soon came in making a lot of racket, talking loudly the minute he came through the door. He had a jaundiced look, and there was something a little mad about him. Upon the arrival of this constant talker, the others began to break up into groups, apparently to avoid the boredom of having to listen to him.

As they moved away from the fireplace, they drew closer to the lower end of the table, where Julien was. His face showed increasing embarrassment, because after all, no matter how he tried not to, he couldn't help overhearing. And even though he was highly inexperienced, he could very well understand the importance of the things they were all openly discussing. But how these exalted personages ought to have wanted them to remain secret!

Soon, though he had been working as slowly as possible, Julien had already sharpened twenty pens; he was going to miss having recourse to that task. In vain, he scanned the face of Monsieur de La Mole for some order, but the marquis had forgotten him.



What I'm doing is ridiculous, of course, said Julien to himself as he slowly sharpened pens. But people who look as ordinary as these do, and who have such weighty matters entrusted to them by others—or perhaps by themselves—are probably very touchy. And I have, unfortunately, a face that tends to look questioning and not quite respectful enough, which would undoubtedly annoy them. On the other hand, if I keep my eyes completely lowered, I'll look as if I'm making a mental record of everything they say.

His embarrassment was extreme; he was hearing some strange things being said.

## 22

# THE DISCUSSION

*The republic!—For every one person today who makes sacrifices for the common good, there are millions who only care about their own pleasures, their own vanity. In Paris, a man earns respect based on his coach, not on his virtue.*

**NAPOLEON, MÉMOIRAL<sup>149</sup>**

A footman entered rapidly, announcing:

“Monsieur le Duc de \*\*\*”

“Shut up, you fool,” said the duke as he entered. And he said it so well, with such majesty, that despite himself Julien couldn't help thinking that knowing how to express annoyance with a footman must be the sum total of this great man's abilities. Julien raised his eyes, and then quickly lowered them. He had so clearly understood the importance of the man who just entered the room that he trembled, fearful that his glance alone could be seen as an indiscretion.

This duke was a man of fifty, dressed like a dandy, with a springing kind of walk. He had a narrow head and big nose, with a curving face that seemed to

be thrusting forward. It would have been difficult for anyone to appear at the same time both so aristocratic and so insignificant. His arrival signaled the beginning of the meeting.

Julien's physiognomic observations were abruptly interrupted by the voice of Monsieur de La Mole. "Allow me to introduce to you all the abbé Sorel," said the marquis, "who is gifted with a startlingly powerful memory. Only an hour ago, when I had told him about the mission with which we might honor him, in order to give some proof of his memory, he's learned by heart the first page of *La Quotidienne*."

"Ah yes, the news from abroad, from poor old N \*\*\*, " said the master of the house.<sup>150</sup> He seized hold of the paper with eagerness, and by dint of trying so hard to appear important, he gave Julien a look that was downright comical: "Begin, Monsieur," he said.

The silence was profound; all eyes were on Julien. He recited so well that after twenty lines, the duc said, "That will do." The small man with the wild boar's face sat down. He was to chair the meeting, for as soon as he was settled, he pointed out a card table to Julien, indicating he should bring it up next to him. Julien took his place there along with his writing materials. He counted twelve people seated around the green cloth.

"Monsieur Sorel," said the duc, "you may go into the next room. We'll call you later."

The master of the house seemed disturbed by this. "The shutters aren't fully closed," he said to his neighbor, and then calling to Julien, absurdly, "there's no point in trying to look out the window." Julien thought, here I am, involved in what is, at the least, some kind of conspiracy. Fortunately, it isn't the kind that ends up on the place de Grève.<sup>151</sup> But if there is any danger, I owe that and a lot more to the marquis. What good fortune it would be if I got the chance to make amends for all the grief my follies might cause him someday.

While reflecting on those follies and his misfortunes, he didn't fail to observe his surroundings so carefully that he could never forget them. Only now did he recall that he had never heard the marquis tell the driver what street to go to—and that in fact the marquis had taken a cab, something he never did.

Julien was left to his reflections for a long while. He was in a room with red velvet hangings that had gold trim. On a table stood a large ivory crucifix, and on the mantel was a copy of Monsieur de Maistre's book *Du pape*, in a rich, magnificent binding, the pages gilt-edged.<sup>152</sup> Julien opened it, so as not to appear to be listening. From time to time voices were raised in the neighboring room. Finally, the door opened, and he was summoned.

"Keep in mind, gentlemen," the chairman was saying, "that from now on you are speaking to the Duc de \*\*\*. This gentleman," he nodded toward Julien, "is a young Levite devoted to our holy cause, who will repeat, thanks to his prodigious powers of memory, exactly what we say, down to the smallest detail.

"The floor is Monsieur's," he said, indicating the person with the fatherly air, the one wearing three or four waistcoats. Julien found it easiest to think of him as the man with the waistcoats. He took a sheet of paper and began his lengthy task of copying down what was said.

(At this juncture, the author was hoping to insert a page filled with dots. That would be graceless right now, says the publisher, and if a frivolous book like this fails to be graceful, it'll die unread.

"Politics," says the author, "is like a millstone attached to the neck of literature, one that will sink it altogether in less than six months. Politics in the middle of a work of imaginative literature is like a pistol shot in the middle of a concert. The noise is overwhelming, without contributing energy. It doesn't harmonize with the sound of any of the instruments. Such political material will mortally offend half the readers, and bore the other half, who've already been reading more interesting and more energetic political material in their morning paper."

The publisher replies, "If your characters don't talk politics, they clearly aren't French people in 1830, and your book is no longer the mirror you like to claim it is . . .")

Julien's minutes were twenty-six pages long; what follows is an all-too pale extract, because it was necessary, as it always is, to edit out the absurdities, the sheer frequency of which would have seemed either odious or scarcely believable. (See the *Gazette des Tribunaux*.)<sup>153</sup>

The man with the waistcoats and the fatherly air (he may have been a bishop) smiled often, and when he did, his eyes, with their fluttering lids took on a remarkable brilliance, giving him a less indecisive look than he usually had. This individual, chosen to be the first to speak before the duc (but which duke is it? wondered Julien), apparently to explain the varying viewpoints rather like a public prosecutor summing up a case, seemed to Julien to fall into all the uncertainty and indecision for which such lawyers are often reproached. Indeed, in the course of the discussion, the duc himself reproached him for it.

After indulging in a number of moral and philosophical generalities, the waistcoat man said:

“The noble England, steered by a great man, the immortal Pitt,<sup>154</sup> spent forty billion francs to curb the Revolution. If this assembly will allow me to state, with some frankness, a sad truth, England never understood clearly that with a man like Napoleon, especially when all they had to oppose him was a set of good intentions, the only decisive step possible had to be a personal one . . .”

“Oh, more hymns of praise for assassinations!” said the host, uneasily.

“Please spare us your sentimental homilies,” exclaimed the chairman in an angry tone, his wild boar’s eye glittering ferociously. “Continue,” he said to the waistcoat man. The chairman’s cheeks and forehead glowed purple.

“The noble England,” he went on, “is crushed today, because today, any Englishman who wants to buy his bread must first help pay the interest on the forty billion francs that were spent opposing the Jacobins. They no longer have a Pitt—”

“They have a Duke of Wellington,” interrupted a military man who projected an aura of importance.

“Please, gentlemen, silence!” cried the chairman. “If we continue arguing with each other, there will have been no need to call in Monsieur Sorel.”

“We all know that Monsieur has many ideas,” said the duc, seeming irritated as he gazed over at the one-time general under Napoleon. Julien could tell that this was some sort of allusion to something both personal and deeply offensive. Everyone else smiled; the defector general looked ready to burst with rage.

“There is no more Pitt, gentlemen,” the spokesman continued, sounding discouraged, like a man who has given up on making his listeners see reason.

“And even if there were to arise a new Pitt in England, you can’t dupe a whole nation twice in the same way . . .”

“Which is why a victorious general, a Bonaparte, will never again be possible in France,” exclaimed the military interrupter.

This time, neither the chairman nor the duc dared say anything, though Julien thought he could see from their eyes that they wanted to very badly. They lowered their gazes, and the duc contented himself with emitting a mighty sigh, heard by everyone.

But the spokesman had taken offense.

“You all want to make me hurry and finish,” he said heatedly, dropping altogether the smile and the civility and the measured language that Julien had thought defined his character; “You’re in a hurry for me to finish; no one gives me any credit for the efforts I’ve made to avoid offending anyone, which takes a little patience. Very well, gentlemen: I’ll be brief.

“And I’ll say it to you in the bluntest of words: England doesn’t have so much as a sou left to defend the good cause. Pitt himself, if he came back and brought all his genius with him, would be unable to talk the smallholders of England into it, because they all know that the brief campaign of Waterloo cost them, just that campaign alone, a billion francs. So, since you all want plain language,” the spokesman continued, growing more and more animated, “I’ll put it to you this way: *Help yourselves*,<sup>155</sup> because England doesn’t have a guinea to give you, and if England doesn’t pay up, Austria, Russia, and Prussia—which have only courage, no money—cannot support more than one or two campaigns against France.

“We can hope that the young soldiers enlisted by Jacobinism will be defeated in the first campaign, or perhaps in the second. But in the third—and excuse me if I sound like a revolutionary myself—in the third, you’ll be facing the soldiers of 1794, not the hastily recruited peasants of 1792.”

Now interruptions were coming from several points at once.

“Monsieur,” the chairman said to Julien, “go off and make a copy of the first part of the minutes you’ve taken.” Julien left the room with great regret. The spokesman had just made reference to some eventualities that he had often thought about.

They're afraid I'll laugh at them, he thought. When he was called back in, Monsieur de La Mole was saying, with an earnestness in his voice that Julien, who knew him, found quite amusing:

"... Yes, gentlemen, the question must be asked of this unfortunate nation:

*Will it be a god, a table, or a bowl?*

"And the poet exclaimed: *it will be a god!*<sup>156</sup> That noble, profound fable seems to apply to you, Messieurs. If you act for yourselves, our noble France will return to what she was when our ancestors created her, and what she was before the death of Louis XVI.

"England, or at least her noble lords, detests the loathsome Jacobinism as much as we do, and without English gold, Austria, Russia, and Prussia can't fight more than two or three battles. Would that be enough to bring back a desirable occupation, like the one Monsieur Richelieu squandered in 1817?<sup>157</sup> I don't think so."

Here there was an interruption, but the "Sshh!" of the others put an end to it. It had come, again, from the former general of the Empire, who was seeking the blue sash for himself, and wanted to be a prominent figure among those responsible for the secret note.

"I don't think so," Monsieur de La Mole repeated after the interruption. He put special stress on the word *I*, with a kind of insolence that delighted Julien. Very well played, he said to himself, though his pen continued to fly over the page almost as fast as the marquis could speak. With one word said in just the right way, Monsieur de La Mole annihilates all twenty campaigns that turncoat was in.

"We mustn't look to foreign powers alone," the marquis continued in more measured tones, "if we want to see a new military occupation. All those young men writing incendiary articles for *Le Globe* will produce for you three or four thousand young captains, among whom might be found a Kleber, a Hoche, a Jourdan, a Pichegru, but less well intentioned."<sup>158</sup>

"We never gave him the honors he deserved," said the chairman. "We should have made his memory immortal."

"In short, we must have two parties in France," Monsieur de La Mole con-

tinued, “but they must really be two parties, clearly defined, and firmly divided. We must be clear about who needs to be crushed. On the one side, the journalists, voters, public opinion, in short; youth, and all who admire it. While that party deafens itself with the sound of its own voices, let us recall that we enjoy the sure advantage of being able to feed ourselves from the budget.”

Here there was another interruption.

“You, Monsieur,” said Monsieur de La Mole to the interrupter with an admirably assured condescension, “you don’t ‘feed yourself from it,’ if that phrase shocks you so—no, you *devour* forty thousand francs from the state budget, and another eighty thousand you get from the civil list.<sup>159</sup>

“Well, Monsieur, since you force me to it, let me boldly take you as an example. Like your noble ancestors who followed Saint Louis on the Crusade, you really ought to be able to show us something in return for those hundred and twenty thousand francs—at least a regiment, a company—no, just a half company, or just fifty men ready to do battle and devoted to the good cause both in life and in death. But all you have are lackeys who, if an uprising were to break out, would frighten nobody but you yourself.

“The Throne, the Altar, the nobility all could perish tomorrow, Messieurs, unless you create, in every département, a force of five hundred *dedicated* men. And by dedicated I mean not just with French bravery but with the loyalty and constancy of the Spanish.

“One-half of this should be composed of our children, our nephews, true gentlemen in short. And each of them must have by his side not some loud-mouthed bourgeois who’ll rush off to raise the striped emblem if 1815 happens again,<sup>160</sup> but a good peasant, simple and true, like Cathelineau.<sup>161</sup> Our gentleman will have instructed him, and the two should be, if at all possible, like brothers. Let each of us agree to sacrifice *one-fifth* of our income to create this little dedicated troop of five hundred men per département. Then you can count on a foreign occupation. Foreign troops won’t get as far as Dijon if they aren’t sure of being met by five hundred friendly soldiers in each département.

“The foreign kings will only listen to you when you can tell them that there are twenty thousand gentlemen ready to take up arms to open France’s borders

to them. This is a difficult burden to take on, you'll say, but Messieurs, this is the price it will cost to keep our heads. Between the liberty of the press and our continued existence as gentlemen, there must be war to the death. Become manufacturers, become peasants—or pick up your gun. Be timid if you wish, but do not be stupid: open your eyes.

“‘*Form your battalions,*’ I’d say to you, borrowing a line from the Jacobin song.<sup>162</sup> Then some noble Gustavus Adolphus will appear and, alarmed by the imminent threat to the principle of monarchy, he’ll come galloping three hundred leagues from his own country to do for you what Gustavus did for the Protestant princes.<sup>163</sup> Would you rather keep on talking and not act? In that case, in fifty years there won’t be a king left in Europe, only presidents of republics. And when those four letters, K-I-N-G, are gone, gone too will be the priests and the gentlemen. I look into the future and see nothing but *candidates* paying court to filthy *majorities*.

“It’s no good to go on saying that France doesn’t have a general right now who can be relied upon, who’s known and loved by all, and that the army is organized only in the interests of the throne and the altar, and that all the old soldiers have been dismissed, while every Prussian and Austrian regiment has fifty subofficers who’ve been under fire.

“Two hundred thousand young men of the lower middle classes are in love with the thought of war . . .”

“Enough of these unpleasant truths,” said a grave personage in a fully confident tone of voice; he was apparently high up on the ecclesiastical ladder, because Monsieur de La Mole responded with a pleasant smile rather than irritation, which said a great deal to Julien.

“Enough of these unpleasant truths. To sum things up, Messieurs: the man with a gangrened leg that needs to be amputated would be ridiculous if he were to say to the surgeon, ‘this leg is perfectly healthy.’ Please excuse the analogy. Messieurs, the noble Duke of \*\*\* is our surgeon.”

“There it is—that’s the name,” thought Julien. “So, I’ll be galloping off to \*\*\* tonight.”<sup>164</sup>



# OF CLERGY, FORESTS, AND LIBERTY

*The primary law for every creature is self-preservation,  
Staying alive. You sow hemlock, and expect to see ripening corn!*

**MACHIAVELLI**<sup>165</sup>

The same grave personage continued speaking; everyone could see that he knew. He explained, in a gentle, moderate tone, which pleased Julien no end, the following great truths:

“One. England does not have so much as a guinea for our cause; economics and Hume are the fashion there. Even the Saints won’t give us money, and Brougham laughs at us.<sup>166</sup>

“Two. It’s impossible to get more than two campaigns from the European monarchs without English gold, and two campaigns will not be enough to defeat the lower middle classes.

“Three. It’s necessary to form an armed party in France, for without that, the monarchical principle in Europe will not risk even those two campaigns.

“The fourth point I’ll venture to put to you as self-evident is this:

*“It’s impossible to form an armed party in France without the clergy.* I can assert this boldly because I’m going to prove it to you, gentlemen. We must give everything to the clergy.

“One. Because, occupied with their own affairs night and day, and guided by men of high capacity situated out of the storm, three hundred leagues from your frontiers . . .”

“Ah! Rome, Rome!” exclaimed the host.

“Yes, Monsieur: *Rome!*” the cardinal replied with pride. “Despite all the clever little jokes that were all the rage when you were young, I assert openly that in 1830, only the clergy, guided by Rome, can speak to the lower classes.

“Fifty thousand priests repeating the same words on the day their leaders have indicated, and the people, who after all furnish us our soldiers, will be more moved by the voices of their priests than by all the cheap popular songs in the world . . . (This reference set off murmurs in the room.)

“The clergy understands it all better than you,” the cardinal continued, raising his voice. “All the steps you’ve taken toward this one essential goal, *having an armed party in France*, have been taken by us.” Here he began citing facts. “Who arranged for getting eighty thousand rifles to the Vendée?” Etc., etc.

“As long as the clergy are not given back their forests, they have nothing.<sup>167</sup> As soon as there’s a threat of war, the finance minister will write to his agents that there’s no more money available, except for parish priests.<sup>168</sup> At bottom, France is not a believing country, and she loves war. Whoever gives her war will be doubly popular, because making war is starving out the Jesuits, as the vulgar would put it; making war means saving those monsters of pride, the French, from the threat of foreign intervention.”

The cardinal’s speech was being warmly received. He added, “Monsieur de Nerval simply must resign as prime minister; his name alone arouses useless conflict.”<sup>169</sup>

At this, everyone got up and began speaking at the same time. They’ll probably send me out of the room again, thought Julien. But even the wise chairman himself had entirely forgotten about the presence, or even the existence, of Julien.

All eyes turned toward a man Julien recognized. It was Monsieur de Nerval, the prime minister, whom he had seen at the ball of the Duc de Retz.

*The disorder reached fever pitch*, as the newspapers like to say when describing sessions of the Chambre des Députés. It took about a quarter of an hour for silence to be reestablished.

Then Monsieur de Nerval stood and, adopting the tone of an apostle: "I will not pretend to you," he said in that extraordinary voice of his, "that I am indifferent to the ministerial position.

"I have had it proved to me, Messieurs, that my very name doubles the forces of the Jacobins, turning a great number of moderates against us. I would therefore willingly retire; but the ways of God are visible only to a select few; because," he added, looking fixedly at the cardinal, "I have a mission; heaven has spoken to me and has said: 'You will either lose your head on the scaffold, or you will reestablish the monarchy in France and reduce the Chambers to what the parlement was in the days of Louis XV'—and that, gentlemen, *I will do!*"

He said no more and sat back down. A great silence followed.

Now that's a good actor, thought Julien. But he was wrong, because, as he usually did, he credited people with too much intelligence. Animated by the lively debates of this evening and especially by the sincerity of the discussion, at that moment Monsieur de Nerval really did believe in his mission. The man had enormous courage, and almost no sense.

In the silence following that resounding "*I will do!*" midnight struck. Julien thought the sound of the bells had something imposing and funereal about it. He was moved.

The discussion soon resumed with even greater energy and with an incredible candor. These people will have me poisoned, Julien thought at certain moments. How can they say such things in front of a plebeian?

Two o'clock struck and they were still talking. The host had been asleep for some time; Monsieur de La Mole had had to call for servants to come and replace the candles. Monsieur de Nerval, the prime minister, had left at one forty-five, not without having carefully studied Julien's face in a mirror he kept near him. His departure seemed to put the others at ease.

While the candles were being replaced, "God knows what that man is going to tell the king!" said the man with the waistcoats quietly to his neighbor. "He could make us sound ridiculous and ruin our future.

“I must admit the man suffers from no doubts about his own importance, and he’s got a lot of nerve showing up here. He used to come around before rising to the ministry, but having a portfolio changes everything, overwhelms all a man’s other interests, which he ought to have sensed.”

As soon as the prime minister was gone, Bonaparte’s general closed his eyes. Now he talked about his health and his wounds, checked his watch, and left.

“I’d bet,” said the man with the waistcoats, “that our general is hurrying off to catch up with the minister; he’ll apologize for having been here, and pretend he’s our leader.”

The servants, all of them half asleep, had finished replacing the candles.

“Messieurs, it’s time for us to deliberate,” said the chairman, “and stop trying to convince one another. We need to concentrate on the content of the document that, in forty-eight hours, will be shown to our friends abroad. People have referred to ministers. Well, we can frankly say, now that Monsieur de Nerval has left us: what do we care about ministers? We can make them do our will.”

The cardinal approved, with a thin smile.

“Nothing easier than summing up our position,” said the young bishop of Agde, with the intense focus and vehemence of the most exalted fanatic. Until now he had been silent; his eyes, Julien had observed, at first seemed calm and gentle, but after the first hour of the discussion they began to become fiery. Right now, his whole being seemed to be overflowing, like lava from Vesuvius.

“From 1806 to 1814, England did only one thing wrong,” he said, “and that was failing to act directly, personally with regard to Napoleon. Once that man had created dukes and chamberlains, once he had reestablished the throne, the mission God had given him was concluded; the only good thing to do at that point would have been to sacrifice him. Holy Scripture teaches us, in more than one place, how to deal with tyrants.” (Here he gave a number of Latin quotations.)

“Today, Messieurs, it’s no longer a single man who must be sacrificed: today it’s Paris. All France copies Paris. What’s the good of arming your five hundred

men per département? It's a risky enterprise, and it'll have no end. Why involve all of France in an affair that only concerns Paris? Only Paris, with its newspapers and its salons has committed the evil; let this new Babylon perish.

"The battle between the altar and Paris must be won. Such a catastrophe would even serve the interests of the throne. Why did Paris not dare murmur under Bonaparte? Go ask the cannon at Saint-Roch."<sup>170</sup>



It was three o'clock in the morning when Julien left, along with Monsieur de La Mole.

The marquis was ill at ease and fatigued. For the first time in his speech to Julien, there was a kind of pleading note. He asked him to give his word never to reveal the excesses of zeal—that was his phrase—that chance had allowed him to witness. "Don't say anything about it to our foreign friend, unless he specifically wants to know what our young fools are like. What do they care if the whole state is overthrown? They'll be cardinals, they can take refuge in Rome. As for us—we'll be out in our châteaux, being massacred by the peasants."

The secret note the marquis drafted out of the full twenty-six pages of minutes Julien had written wasn't finished until four forty-five.

"I'm exhausted," said the marquis, "and that shows in this report; it's too unclear toward the end. I'm more unhappy with this than with anything I've written in my life. Here, my friend," he added, "why don't you go off and rest for a few hours. Just to be sure nobody tries to abduct you, I'll lock you in your room."

The next day, the marquis took Julien to an isolated château some distance from Paris. They were welcomed by some strange hosts, who Julien thought must be priests. They provided him with a passport with an assumed name, but one that did indicate, at last, his real destination, which he had been at pains to pretend not to know. All alone, he got into a carriage.

The marquis was fully confident about Julien's memory, for he had recited the note to him several times already, but he was concerned he might be intercepted.

When the two of them were leaving the room, the marquis said to him in a friendly tone: "Don't forget: always make it look as if you're a young fop out traveling just to kill time. There might have been more than one false friend at our meeting last night."

The journey was rapid and quite dismal. Julien had scarcely been out of the marquis's sight when he forgot all about the secret note and returned to his painful memories of Mathilde's contempt.

At a village some leagues past Metz, the master of the posthouse informed him there were no horses available. It was ten at night; Julien, highly annoyed, ordered some supper. He paced in front of the door and, when he could not be seen, slipped over to the stable. He saw no horses.

That man had something strange about him, Julien said to himself. He was studying me with that vulgar eye of his.

He was beginning, as the reader can see, to draw back from believing everything that anyone said to him. He thought about making his escape after dinner, and wishing to learn something about the neighborhood, he left his room and went to warm himself by the fire in the kitchen. Imagine his delight when he found Signor Geronimo there, the famous singer!

Sitting in an armchair that he had had brought to the fireside for him, the Neapolitan was groaning and doing more talking himself than all the twenty or so German peasants who sat around him gaping at him.

"These people will be the ruin of me," he exclaimed to Julien. "I've promised to sing tomorrow in Mainz. Seven sovereign princes have hurried over there just to hear me. But come, let's get some fresh air," he added, giving Julien a significant look.

When they had gone about a hundred paces and could no longer be overheard:

"There's something up," he said to Julien. "This master of the posthouse is shady. While I went out for a walk, I gave twenty sous to a little boy who told

me everything. There are more than a dozen horses in a stable at the other end of the village. They're trying to keep some courier from getting through."

"Really?" said Julien, innocently.

But having discovered the fraud wasn't enough; they still had to leave somehow, and Geronimo and his friend couldn't figure out a way to do it. "Let's wait till daybreak," the singer finally said. "They don't trust us. Maybe it's you or even me they're looking for. Tomorrow morning we can order a good breakfast, and while they're making it we can say we're taking a walk and then make our escape. We can go rent two horses and catch up with the next post."

"What about your luggage?" Julien asked, thinking that maybe Geronimo had actually been dispatched to intercept him. They had no choice but to eat and go to bed. Julien was still in his first sleep when he started awake, hearing the voices of two people talking in his room without even trying to be quiet.

He recognized the master of the posthouse, carrying a veiled lantern. Its light was directed toward the carriage's trunk, which Julien had had carried up to his room. Standing next to the posthouse master was another man, who was unhurriedly rummaging through the trunk's contents. Julien could only make out the sleeves of his coat, which were black and tight-fitting.

"It's a cassock," he thought, and he reached gently and carefully for his two small pistols, which he had placed under his pillow.

"You don't have to worry about waking him, Father," said the posthouse master. "The wine they were served was from the stuff you prepared yourself."

"I'm not finding any trace of papers," the priest replied. "Plenty of linen, scents, pomades, little vanities. This is just a typical young man of our time, focused on nothing but his pleasures. No, the emissary must be the other one, the one who pretends to speak with an Italian accent."

Both men came up close to Julien's bed to search through the pockets of his traveling coat. He was strongly tempted to kill them both for thieves. The consequences would have been perfectly safe. He truly felt like doing it . . . It'd be foolish, he thought; it'd compromise the mission. Once his clothes had been thoroughly searched, the priest said, this is no diplomat, and with that he moved away, which was the wisest thing he could have done.

If he touches me in my bed, he's done for! Julien was thinking. He might well have come in here to stab me, and I won't let him do that!

The priest turned his head, and Julien opened his eyes just a little—and to his astonishment, he saw it was the abbé Castanède! Indeed, even though the two of them were trying to keep their voices down, he thought he had recognized the one voice. Julien seethed with the desire to rid the earth of one of its foulest villains . . .

But my mission! he said to himself.

The priest and his acolyte left the room. Fifteen minutes later, Julien pretended to wake up. He called out for help, waking up the whole house.

"I've been poisoned!" he cried. "I'm in agony!" He was looking for some cover to go and help Geronimo. He found the man half-asphyxiated with the laudanum in the wine.

Julien had been afraid there might be some trick like this in the wind, and so had only eaten the chocolate he'd brought with him from Paris. He couldn't manage to get Geronimo awake enough to leave the place.

"You could offer me the whole kingdom of Naples," the singer was saying, "and I still wouldn't give up the pleasure of sleeping right now."

"But the seven sovereign princes!"

"They can wait."

So Julien left on his own, and he arrived without further incident at his destination where the important personage resided. He spent all morning trying to solicit an audience. At about four o'clock, fortunately, the duke decided to go out for some fresh air. Julien saw him going out on foot, and without hesitation he rushed up to the man begging for alms. When he was about two paces away, he took out the watch the marquis had given him, displaying it ostentatiously. "*Follow me at a distance,*" he said, without looking at him.

About a quarter of a league from the house, the duke abruptly turned and entered a little *Kaffeehaus*.<sup>171</sup> In a room inside that humblest of inns, Julien had the honor of reciting his four pages to the duke. And when he had finished: *Start over, and this time go more slowly,* he was told.

The prince took notes. *Go, on foot, to the next posthouse. Leave your things*



*and your carriage here. Get to Strasbourg as best as you can, and on the twenty-second of this month (it was now the tenth), come back and be in this same Kaffeehaus at half past noon. Don't leave now for another half an hour. Say nothing!*

Such were the only words spoken to Julien. They were enough to fill him with the greatest admiration. This, he said to himself, is the way to handle great affairs. What would this great statesman say if he could have heard all those overheated loudmouths a few nights ago?

Julien took two days getting to Strasbourg, feeling there would be nothing for him to do there. He took a wide detour. If that demon Father Castanède recognized me, he's not the kind of man to lose my trail easily. And what a fine victory for him if he could end up laughing at me and ruining my mission!

Father Castanède, chief of the Congrégation's police force for the entire northern border region, had most fortunately not recognized him. And the Jesuits of Strasbourg, zealous as they were, never thought of keeping Julien under observation, for he, with his cross decorating his blue coat, had all the hallmarks of a young officer whose only thought was for how good he could manage to look.

## 24

# STRASBOURG

*Infatuation! You have all the energy of love, and all its power for enduring unhappiness. But its enchanting pleasures, its sweet delights are out of your sphere.*

*I could not say, while watching her sleep: she is entirely mine, with her angelic beauty, with her sweet weaknesses! See, she is delivered into my power just as heaven created her, out of mercy and to enchant the heart of a man.*

SCHILLER, ODE<sup>172</sup>

Having to spend a week in Strasbourg, Julien tried to distract himself with grand thoughts of martial glory and devotion to his country. Was he still in love? He didn't know, but he did know that Mathilde continued to torment his mind, and that she continued to function as absolute mistress of his happiness and of his imagination. He needed all his force of character to keep himself from slipping into utter despair. Thinking about anything that didn't have at least some connection to Mademoiselle de La Mole was beyond his powers. His ambitions and the little, simple successes of his vanity used to distract him from oppressive feelings when he was involved with Madame de Rênal, but now, Mathilde had absorbed everything; everywhere in the future that he tried to look, he kept seeing her there.

And Julien could not envision success in any aspect of that future. This person you and I observed for so long in Verrières, so full of presumption, of pride, was now fallen into a ridiculous opposite extreme of modesty and self-doubt.

Three days before, he would have taken great pleasure in killing Father Castanède, and now, in Strasbourg, if some boy on the street had picked a quarrel with him, he would have told the boy he was in the right. As he thought back on the adversaries, the enemies he had encountered in his life, he concluded in every case that he, Julien, had been in the wrong.

And all this was because he now had an implacable enemy: his own powerful imagination, which in the past had always been busily painting pictures for him of brilliant future successes.

That grim imagination had its power amplified now, in the absolute solitude that is the traveler's life. What a treasure a friend would be! But, thought Julien, is there a heart anywhere that beats for me? And even if I did have a friend, wouldn't honor condemn me to maintain eternal silence?

He went riding on his horse, in a melancholy mood, in the region around Kehl; Kehl is a town on the banks of the Rhine, immortalized by Desaix and Gouvion Saint-Cyr.<sup>173</sup> A German peasant was showing him around the little streams, the paths, and the islands in the Rhine that were made famous through the courageous exploits of those great generals. Julien, leading his horse with his left hand, carried in his right the *Mémoires* of Maréchal Saint-

Cyr, open to the superb map that ornaments the volume. A cheerful exclamation made him pause and look up.

It was Prince Korasoff, his friend from his time in London, who had in those days instructed him in the key elements of high absurdity. Still faithful to that great art, Korasoff had arrived in Strasbourg the day before, and at Kehl an hour before; and now, never having in his life read a single line concerning the siege of 1796, he proceeded to explain it all to Julien. The German peasant, astonished, gaped at him, because he knew enough French to see the enormous blunders the prince was making. Julien was a thousand miles away from what the peasant was thinking, gazing instead upon this elegant young man and admiring the grace with which he sat his horse.

A cheerful nature! he said to himself. Look how well his trousers suit him, and how elegantly his hair is styled! Alas! I should have been like that, and then maybe, after loving me for three days, she wouldn't have cut me loose with such aversion.

When the prince had finished narrating his version of the siege of Kehl: "The look on your face reminds me of a Trappist," he said to Julien. "You're overdoing the gravity principle I taught you in London. A sad look is never the right thing; you need to have a bored look. If you're sad, there must be something you lack, something that suggests some kind of failure.

*"It's letting yourself be seen as inferior.* Be bored, on the contrary! That shows that whoever has been vainly trying to please you—that person is the inferior. You understand, my dear man, how serious it is to confuse the two."

Julien tossed an écu to the peasant, who still stood there gaping.

"There you go!" said the prince. "Good—graceful, noble disdain! Well done!" and with that he started his horse galloping. Julien followed, filled with a stupid admiration.

Ah, if I could have been like him, she would never have preferred Croise-nois! The more the prince's absurdities shocked his reason, the more he detested himself for not admiring them, and the lower he fell in his own estimation for lacking those very absurdities. His self-disgust could not have been worse.

The prince found him decidedly sad. “Ah, my friend,” he asked as they returned to Strasbourg, “have you lost all your money, or have you fallen in love with some little actress?”

The Russians copy French ways, but always at a distance of fifty years. They are, as of this writing, in the century of Louis XV.

The little witticisms about love brought tears to Julien’s eyes: Why don’t I try to get some advice from this pleasant fellow? he suddenly thought.

“Well, you’ve guessed it, my friend,” he said to the prince. “You see me here in Strasbourg terribly in love and terribly jilted. A charming woman, who lives in a nearby town, has dropped me after three days of love, and the change in her is killing me.”

He went on to describe for the prince, using fictitious names, the actions and the character of Mathilde.

“Stop right there,” said Korasoff. “To give you confidence in your doctor, I’m going to finish your story myself. The husband of this young woman enjoys an enormous fortune, or rather it’s actually she who belongs to the highest level of nobility in the region. Obviously, she’s terribly proud about something.”

Julien nodded, lacking the courage to speak.

“Very well,” said the prince. “I’m prescribing three bitter pills you must take without delay:

“One. You must go every day to see Madame—what was her name?”

“Madame Dubois.”

“Ha! What a name!” said the prince, breaking out in laughter. “But forgive me—she must be sublime to you. Now, you must see Madame Dubois every day. Above all, never let her see you looking cold or unhappy. Always remember the great principle of this century: be the opposite of what everyone expects. Show yourself to be exactly the way you were a week before she honored you with her favors.”

“Ah, my life was calm then,” cried Julien in despair. “I thought I was the one taking pity on her . . .”

“The moth gets burned by the flame,” the prince went on, “oldest comparison in the world.

“One. You’ll see her every day.

“Two. You’ll start courting another woman in her circle, but without showing any passion about it, you understand. I won’t lie to you, the role you must play is difficult. You’re an actor now, but if she ever suspects that you’re acting, you’re lost.”

“Oh, she’s much cleverer than I am! I’m lost, all right,” said Julien sorrowfully.

“No, no, you’re just more in love than I thought you were. Madame Dubois spends too much time thinking of herself, like all women to whom heaven has given too much money or too much nobility. She sees herself instead of seeing you, and thus she doesn’t really know you. During those two or three acts of love she granted you, by the power of imagination she saw in you the hero she’d always dreamed of, not the man you really are . . .

“But what the devil, Sorel—these are all the basics. Are you still a school-boy?

“Good Lord! Here, let’s stop in this shop. Here’s a fine black collar. Anyone looking at it would think it must have been made by John Anderson of Burlington Street. Do me a favor and let me throw away that wretched bit of black rope you’ve got wound around your neck.

“Now then,” continued the prince as they stepped back out of Strasbourg’s finest haberdasher, “what sort of society does Madame Dubois keep? Good God, what a name! Please don’t be offended, dear Sorel, I really can’t help it . . . So which lady will you begin to approach?”

“There’s one who’s a mighty prude, daughter to a very wealthy hosier. She has the prettiest eyes in the world, and I like them enormously. She’s at the pinnacle of the local society, but amid all her grandeur, she reddens and gets overwhelmed if anybody so much as mentions business and the shop. Unfortunately, her father is one of the best-known merchants in Strasbourg.”

“So if someone mentions *industry*,” said the prince with a laugh, “you can be sure that the lovely lady is thinking of herself and not of you. This weakness of hers is divine and can be highly useful; it’ll keep you from ever seeming foolish in her lovely eyes. Your success is certain.”

Julien was thinking of the Maréchale de Fervagues, who often visited the Hôtel de La Mole. She was a beautiful foreigner who had married the maréchal just a year before his death. Her whole life seemed to be bent on making everyone forget that she was the daughter of an industrialist, and to ensure that she was important in Paris she had put herself at the very head of the devotees of virtue.

Julien sincerely admired the prince. What wouldn't he have given to be absurd in just the same way! The two friends chatted on endlessly. Korasoff was delighted: no Frenchman had ever paid this much attention to him. Well, I guess I've finally arrived! said the prince to himself happily. I've reached the point of giving lessons to my masters!

He said to Julien, for at least the tenth time, "We're in agreement, yes? Not so much as a hint of passion when you speak to the beautiful young daughter of the stocking merchant of Strasbourg in the presence of Madame Dubois. But when you write, it's just the opposite: the letter needs to burn with passion! Reading a well-written love letter is the prude's sovereign pleasure. It's the moment she allows herself to loosen up a little. Then, she's not acting a role; then, she dares to listen to her heart. Thus: two letters a day."

"Never, never!" cried Julien, discouraged. "I'd rather let myself be pounded into dust in a mortar than have to compose even a few lines. I'm a walking dead man, my friend—you can't expect anything more from me. Just let me lie down and die by the side of the road."

"But who said anything about composing anything? I've got a six-volume set with me of love letters in manuscript. There are versions for every kind of female character; I've got plenty for the highly virtuous. Remember when Kalkisky went out to Richmond, a few leagues outside of London, to woo the prettiest Quaker in all England?"

Julien felt less miserable when he left his friend at two in the morning.

The next day, the prince called in a copyist, and two days later Julien had fifty-three love letters, all carefully numbered and designed to overcome even the most sublime, most dismal virtue.

“There aren’t fifty-four of them,” said the prince, “because Kalisky got the boot. But why should you care if you’re maltreated by the stocking merchant’s daughter, since your real target is the heart of Madame Dubois?”

They went out on horseback every day. The prince was crazy about Julien; not knowing how to give some token of this new friendship, he ended up offering him the hand of one of his cousins, a wealthy heiress in Moscow. “And once you two are married,” he added, “my influence, together with that cross you’re wearing, will make you a colonel in two years!”

“Oh, but this cross was not given me by Napoleon—quite the opposite.”

“What’s the difference?” asked the prince. “He invented it, didn’t he? It’s still by far the best decoration you can get anywhere in Europe.”

Julien was tempted to accept the offer, but his duty called upon him to return to the important personage. When he left Korasoff, he promised to write. He got the response to the secret note he had delivered, and he hurried back toward Paris; but he had been by himself for barely two days when the idea of leaving France and Mathilde seemed like a torment worse than death to him. No, I won’t marry the millions Korasoff has offered me, he said to himself, but I will take his advice.

After all, he’s the master of the art of seduction; he’s been thinking about nothing else for fifteen years, and he’s only thirty. Nobody can say he lacks wit; he’s sharp and cunning. Real enthusiasm and poetry are impossible in a nature like his: he’s a go-between. All the more reason to trust him in this.

I have to do it—I’ll pay court to Madame de Fervaques.

She’ll bore me to tears, perhaps, but I’ll just keep looking at those beautiful eyes, which are so similar to the ones I love more than anything in the world.

She’s a foreigner; this is something new for me to study.

I’m insane, and I’m about to drown. All I can do is follow the advice of a friend—and avoid trusting myself.

# THE MINISTRY OF VIRTUE

*But if I enjoy this pleasure with such prudence and  
circumspection, it stops being a pleasure for me.*

LOPE DE VEGA<sup>174</sup>

As soon as he returned to Paris, and after having met with the Marquis de La Mole, who was very disconcerted by the message Julien brought back for him, our hero hurried off to find Comte Altamira. It wasn't enough that he had had the distinction of having been sentenced to death, but the handsome foreigner was also endowed with gravity and religious devotion. The latter two merits—along with, of course, the man's noble birth—made him just the kind of person Madame de Fervaques liked, and she saw him often.

Julien confessed to him, with great solemnity, that he was deeply in love with her.

"Ah—a woman of the purest, the noblest virtue," replied Altamira, "but just a little Jesuitical, and a little overdone. There are days when I can understand every word she speaks, but I can't understand the point she's trying to make. She makes me think that maybe I don't understand French as well as I thought I did. This relationship will boost your profile; it'll give you a little more importance in people's eyes. But let's go see Bustos," said Comte Altamira, a man who knew how to plan things. "He used to court Madame la Maréchale."

Don Diego Bustos had them explain everything to him in detail, leaving nothing out, like a lawyer in his office. He looked like an overweight monk with a black mustache and an extraordinary gravity; other than that, he looked like a good *carbonaro*.<sup>175</sup>

"I understand," he said at last to Julien. "The Maréchale de Fervaques: has



she had lovers, yes or no? Do you have any hope of succeeding with her? That's the question. I have to admit that, for my part, I have failed. But now that it no longer bothers me, I see it this way: she's often in a foul mood, as I will explain in a moment, and she's awfully good at being vindictive.

"I don't see in her that splenetic temperament you find with brilliant people, the kind that casts a kind of veneer of passion over everything they do. No, on the contrary, she has that phlegmatic, complacent nature you find with Hollanders, and this is where she gets that rare beauty, that fresh-looking skin."

Julien was becoming impatient with the slow, determined phlegm of the Spaniard; from time to time, despite himself, he uttered little monosyllables.

"Do you want to listen to me or not?" Don Diego Bustos asked him with solemnity.

"Pardon me—it's my *furia francese*.<sup>176</sup> I'm all ears," said Julien.

"The Maréchale de Fervaques is much given to hatred. She will mercilessly hunt down people she's never seen, lawyers, poor devil literary men who make little songs like Collé. Do you know him?

*Oh, I'm so hot*

*For my little Marotte," etc.*<sup>177</sup>

And Julien was forced to sit and listen to the entire song from beginning to end. The Spaniard relished singing in French.

Yet that divine song could hardly have ever been heard with less patience. When it was over: "La Maréchale," said Don Diego Busto, "arranged for the ruin of the man who wrote this song:

*One day the lover at the inn . . ."*

Julien shuddered in fear that he would go on to sing it, so he focused his attentions on analyzing it. The song was, in point of fact, impious and scarcely decent.

"When the maréchale decided to let herself become enraged about this song," said Don Diego, "I pointed out to her that a woman of her stature should not read all the stupid things that get published. Whatever progress piety and

sobriety might make, there will still always be cabaret songs like this. When Madame de Fervaques had the author, a poor wretch living on half pay, fired from his post worth eighteen hundred francs, I said to her: 'Be careful. you have attacked this rhymester with your weapons, but he might respond with his, that is, his rhymes: he'll write a song about virtue.'<sup>178</sup> The people in the gilded salons will, of course, be on your side, but the people who like to laugh will only spread his epigrams.' Do you know, Monsieur, what the maréchale said to me in response?

"It would be in the interests of Our Lord to let all Paris see me walk the path of the martyr; it would be a new spectacle in France. The commoners would learn to respect people of quality. It would be the finest day of my life.' And never were her eyes more beautiful."

"They really are superb," exclaimed Julien.

"I can see you're in love . . . Well then," Don Diego continued in a solemn tone, "it's not in her nature to be ill tempered and vengeful. But if she does wish to hurt people, it's because she's unhappy. I suspect she suffers from *inward unhappiness*. Could it be that she's a prude who has grown bored with her calling?"

The Spaniard stopped and looked at him silently for a long minute.

"That's the whole question," he added, gravely, "and that is where you might have some grounds for hope. I gave it a great deal of reflection during the two years that I declared myself her humble servant. Your whole future, young man in love, depends on this great enigma: is she a prude bored with her calling, and wicked because she's unhappy?"

"Or," said Altamira, finally breaking his long silence, "could it be what I've already told you twenty times over? It's just French vanity. It's the memory of her father, the famous dry goods merchant, that underlies the unhappiness in that naturally morose and cold character. Her only happiness would be to go live in Toledo and have herself be tormented by a confessor who would come by daily and describe the horrors of the gaping mouth of hell."

As Julien was leaving, "Altamira has told me," the always grave Don Diego said to him, "that you're one of ours. One day you will help us regain our lost

liberty, just as I've aided you in this little amusement of yours. It would be good for you to know the maréchale's style. Here are four letters in her hand."

"I'll have them copied," exclaimed Julien, "and returned to you."

"And no one will ever hear a word of what we've said here?"

"Never, upon my honor!"

"Then God be with you!" said the Spaniard, and he silently escorted Julien and Altamira to the staircase.

The scene cheered our hero up a bit; in fact, he nearly smiled. And here's the pious Altamira, he said to himself, helping me with my adulterous scheme!

During the whole of the grave discourse of Don Diego Bustos, Julien remained attentive to the hours being struck by the clock tower of the Hôtel d'Aligre.

The dinner hour was approaching—he was going to see Mathilde again! He got back to the house and dressed himself carefully.

No—this is my first mistake, he said as he descended the staircase. I need to follow the prince's advice to the letter.

He went back up to his room and put on the simplest traveler's outfit possible.

Now, he thought, it's a matter of regulating my gaze. It was only five thirty, and dinner was at six. He thought he would go into the drawing room and found it was deserted. At the sight of the blue sofa, he was moved almost to tears; his cheeks were burning. He got down on his knees and kissed the spot where Mathilde rested her arm, bathing it with his tears.<sup>179</sup> I need to get control of this absurd sensibility of mine, he said to himself angrily; it's going to betray me. He picked up a newspaper to make himself appear calm and strolled out to the garden three or four times.

It was only with much trembling, and only when hidden behind a large oak tree, that he dared raise his eyes to the window of Mademoiselle de La Mole. It was firmly shut; he was on the verge of fainting, and he leaned against the oak for a long while. Finally, with unsteady steps, he made his way over to look at the gardener's ladder.

The chain that he had broken in, alas, such different circumstances had not

been repaired. Overcome, in a moment of folly, he bent down and pressed it against his lips.

After wandering back and forth between the garden and the drawing room, Julien suddenly felt horribly fatigued; this was an initial success, and it pleased him no end. My eyes will look dull, and they won't give me away! By now the guests were beginning to arrive in the drawing room. Every time the door opened, Julien's heart stopped beating.

They sat down to the table. Finally Mademoiselle de La Mole arrived, still faithful to her custom of making everyone wait. She blushed deeply upon seeing Julien; no one had told her about his arrival. Following the recommendation of Prince Korasoff, Julien looked at her hands; they were trembling. The discovery agitated him greatly, but he was lucky enough to seem simply fatigued.

Monsieur de La Mole made a point of praising him to all. The marquise spoke to him briefly at that point, commenting on how fatigued he looked. Julien kept saying to himself, I mustn't look at Mademoiselle de La Mole too much, but I mustn't appear to avoid looking at her either. I must try to seem exactly the way I was a week before my misery began . . . He had reason to be satisfied with his performance, and he remained in the drawing room. Attentive to the marquise for the first time, he made every effort to get the men in her circle to talk and to keep the conversation lively.

His polite efforts were rewarded: at eight o'clock, Madame la Maréchale de Fervaques was announced. Julien slipped out and soon returned, dressed now with the greatest of care. Madame de La Mole was hugely appreciative of that mark of respect and tried to show it by speaking to Madame de Fervaques about his journey. Julien sat down next to the maréchale, seating himself so that his eyes would not be visible to Mathilde. Situated thus, and carefully following all the rules of art, he proceeded to make Madame de Fervaques the object of his most awestruck fascination. A soliloquy on that very sentiment was how began the first letter of the fifty-three that Prince Korasoff had given him.

The maréchale announced that she was going to the Opéra-Bouffe. Julien hurried over there, where he met the Chevalier de Beauvoisis, who took him to the box belonging to the gentlemen of the royal household,<sup>180</sup> which was

right next to that of Madame de Fervaques. Julien kept his gaze focused on her. When he returned to the Hôtel: It's essential, he said to himself, that I keep a siege journal; otherwise, I'll forget my various attacks. He forced himself to write two or three pages on this tedious subject, which did, remarkably, keep him from thinking about Mademoiselle de La Mole.

Mathilde had practically forgotten about him while he was on his trip. He's really nothing but a common creature, she thought, and his name will serve as a lifelong reminder of the biggest mistake of my life. I must make a good-faith return to accepted ideas about prudent behavior and about honor; a woman who strays from them has everything to lose. She signaled that she was ready to agree to concluding the agreement with the Marquis de Croisenois, which had been begun long ago. He was almost mad with joy; he would have been completely surprised if anyone had told him that it was actually resignation that underlay this new attitude of Mathilde's, of which he was so proud.

But all Mademoiselle de La Mole's ideas changed when she saw Julien again. The truth of it is, she told herself, he's my husband. If I'm really going to go back to accepted ideas about prudence and honor, he's obviously the one I ought to marry.

She awaited new annoyances from Julien, or some display of misery on his part and had her responses all ready: because, undoubtedly, upon leaving the dining room he would try to say something to her. Far from it: he stayed on in the drawing room, and he never even glanced over toward the garden (God knows how difficult it was!). It will be best to get it all cleared up right away, thought Mademoiselle de La Mole; she went out to the garden by herself—but Julien never followed. Mathilde came back and walked back and forth outside the drawing room's French windows; she saw him fully intent on telling Madame de Fervaques all about the ruins of old castles that are perched high up above the banks of the Rhine, giving it such a distinctive character. He was beginning to perform not so badly when it came to the sentimental and picturesque language that passes for *wit* in certain salons.

Prince Korasoff would have been proud of him, if he had been in Paris; the evening went exactly the way he had predicted.

And he would have approved, too, of Julien's behavior on the following days.

There was an intrigue afoot among members of the hidden government,<sup>181</sup> which was going to be awarding some new blue sashes. Madame la Maréchale de Fervaques was insistent that her great-uncle be named a knight of the order. The Marquis de La Mole was making the same claim for his father-in-law; they decided to combine their efforts, and the maréchale came to the Hôtel de La Mole nearly every day. It was from her that Julien learned the marquis was about to be named a minister: he offered the *Camarilla*<sup>182</sup> an ingenious plan for doing away with the charter, without any fuss, over the next three years.

Julien could expect a bishopric if Monsieur de La Mole rose to the ministry, but in his eyes now, all those important concerns seemed to be hidden behind a veil. His imagination perceived them only vaguely and at a distance, so to speak. The horrible misery that was driving him mad now made him judge the value of everything in his life only insofar as it had any impact on his relationship with Mademoiselle de La Mole. He calculated that after five or six years of careful efforts, he might succeed in making her love him again.

That head of his, once so cool, had sunk, as we can see, into a state of utter unreason. Out of all the qualities that had once distinguished him, the only thing remaining was a little firmness. Precisely faithful to the plan of conduct dictated to him by Prince Korasoff, he placed himself every evening close to the armchair where Madame de Fervaques sat, but he found it impossible to think of anything to say to her.

The efforts he was making to appear cured in Mathilde's eyes exhausted all his emotional strength, so he remained near the maréchale like a being scarcely alive; even his eyes, as a result of his physical suffering, had lost all their fire.

Since the attitude of Madame de La Mole was never anything but a careful replica of her husband's—that man who might make her a duchess one day—she had been praising Julien to the skies over the last few days.

## VIRTUOUS LOVE

*There also was of course in Adeline  
 That calm patrician polish in the address  
 Which ne'er can pass the equinoctial line  
 Of anything which Nature would express:  
 Just as a Mandarin finds nothing fine,  
 At least his manner suffers not to guess  
 That anything he views can greatly please.*

**DON JUAN, CANTO XIII, STANZA 34**<sup>183</sup>

There's something a little mad in the way this whole family looks at things, thought the maréchale; they're all infatuated with their young abbé, who seems unable to do anything but listen—though when he listens, he does look at you with those very attractive eyes.

For his part, Julien found in the maréchale's manner a nearly perfect example of that *patrician calm* that oozes punctilious civility, while also declaring the impossibility of any genuine emotion. Anything unexpected in one's movements, any lack of perfect self-control would have scandalized Madame de Fervaques almost as much as failing to act regally toward one's inferiors. The slightest sign of emotional sensitivity would have seemed, in her eyes, like a kind of moral drunkenness that ought to raise a blush, and like a kind of injury to what a person of exalted rank owes to herself. Her greatest pleasure was chatting about the king's most recent hunt, and her favorite reading was the *Mémoires* of Saint-Simon—especially the genealogical parts.<sup>184</sup>

Julien knew well the very spot that, once the lights had been arranged, was most flattering to the kind of beauty possessed by Madame de Fervaques. He would get there before her, taking great care to turn his chair so that he wouldn't be able to see Mathilde. Flummoxed by his consistently avoiding her,

one day she got up from the blue sofa and came to do her needlework on a little end table close to the maréchale's armchair. Julien was able to get a close view of her by looking just under the brim of Madame de Fervaques's hat. Those eyes, which governed his destiny, frightened him at first, but then they jolted him out of his customary apathy; he spoke then, and he spoke very well.

He spoke to the maréchale, but his real aim was to stir up the heart of Mathilde. His animation became so extreme that Madame de Fervaques had trouble understanding what he was saying.

That was a point for his side. If Julien had thought of going on to utter a few Germanic mystical religiosities, or some Jesuitical ones, the maréchale would have immediately ranked him among the superior men called to regenerate the century.

Since he has the bad taste, Mademoiselle de La Mole said to herself, to talk at that length and with that much enthusiasm to Madame de Fervaques, I won't listen to him anymore. And she kept her word for the rest of that evening, though with some difficulty.

At midnight, when she took her mother's candlestick to escort her up to her room, Madame de La Mole stopped on the staircase to deliver a full-blown speech in praise of Julien. This was the last straw for Mathilde's mood; she couldn't sleep that night. Only one idea gave her some relief: it could be that what I despise in him is exactly what makes him so appealing in the maréchale's eyes.

As for Julien, now that he had begun to take action, he felt less miserable. His eyes happened to glance down at the portfolio made of Russian leather in which Prince Koraskoff had packed his gift of the fifty-three love letters. Julien saw a note at the bottom of the first one: *To be sent one week after the first meeting.*

Oh! I'm late! Julien cried, because I've been seeing Madame de Fervaques longer than that. He immediately sat down and began transcribing the first love letter. It was a veritable homily, full of virtuous pronouncements, and lethally boring; Julien had the good fortune of nodding off on the second page.



A few hours later, the bright sun surprised him as he sat there sprawled on the table. The most painful moments in his life were always when he awakened and *relearned* his pain. But today, he was almost laughing as he finished copying out the letter. Could any young man really write such a thing? he thought. He found several sentences that were nine lines long. At the bottom of the original, he saw a penciled note:

*One must deliver these letters personally—on horseback, wearing a black cravat and a blue waistcoat. One hands the letter to the porter with a contrite air, profound melancholy in one's eyes. If a chambermaid is present, one furtively wipes one's eyes. One should speak to the chambermaid.*

Everything was done just as prescribed.

What I'm doing is too bold, thought Julien, on his horse and riding back from the Hôtel de Fervaques, and it'll prove Korasoff wrong. Daring to write to a famous prude like that! She'll treat me with utter contempt, and that'll be even more amusing. Really, this is the only kind of comedy I can enjoy. Yes, heaping ridicule on that odious creature I call *me*—that will amuse me. If I were left to my own devices, I'd probably commit some kind of crime to distract myself.

For the last month, the best moments in Julien's day were when he brought his horse back to the stables. Korasoff had expressly forbade him to look at the mistress who had dropped him, under any pretext whatsoever. But she knew them so well, the sounds made by his horse's hooves, the sound he made cracking his whip to get a groom's attention, and these sometimes drew Mathilde to stand at her window, behind her curtain, and watch. The muslin of the curtain was so thin that Julien could see through it. If he looked up in a certain careful way from beneath the brim of his hat, he could glimpse Mathilde's shape without seeing her eyes. That means she can't see mine either, he said to himself, so this doesn't count as looking at her.

When evening came, Madame de Fervaques behaved toward him exactly as if she had not received his philosophical, religious, and mystical dissertation

that morning—the one that had been handed to her porter with such an air of melancholy. The day before, chance had revealed to Julien the way to stimulate his eloquence; he had positioned himself in such a way that he could look over and see Mathilde's eyes. For her part, as soon as Madame de Fervaques arrived, Mathilde got up and left the blue sofa: this meant she was deserting her usual circle. Monsieur de Croisenois seemed annoyed at this new whim of hers; his visible irritation acted like a balm on Julien's suffering.

That unexpected turn of events made him eloquent as an angel. And because pride will find a way to slip itself into even those hearts dedicated to the most exalted virtue, Madame de La Mole is right, thought the maréchale as she got into her carriage that evening; that young priest really is quite distinguished. I suppose my presence intimidated him at first. It's true that everything one encounters in this house has something rather frivolous about it. The only virtue I see is the kind that old age helps along, and it truly needed the icing over that age brings. Now this young man must have been able to see all this. He writes well, but I do fear that the request he makes of me to enlighten him with my counsel, which he asks in his letter, may be founded on something of whose true nature he isn't aware.

Still, so many conversations have begun like this! What makes me think this one augurs well is the fact that the style he writes in is so much better than that of the other young men whose letters I've had the opportunity to read. You can't help seeing piety, a profound seriousness, and a great deal of conviction in the prose of this young Levite; he must have the gentle virtue of Massillon.<sup>185</sup>

# THE FINEST POSITIONS IN THE CHURCH

*Services! Talents! Merit! Bah!*  
*Get yourself some connections.*

TÉLÉMAQUE<sup>186</sup>

And so the idea of a bishopric became linked with Julien for the first time in the mind of a woman who sooner or later would be in a position to distribute the finest positions in the French Church. But such a gift was of little interest to Julien; during this period, his thoughts were unable to rise above his present misery and contemplate anything else. And everything only worsened the misery; even the sight of his bedroom had become unendurable to him. When he returned there at night with his candle, every piece of furniture, every little ornament seemed to take on a voice, and the voice only told him of some new bitter detail in his suffering.

On that day, I'm sentenced to hard labor, he said to himself as he entered his room, but he felt an unusual eagerness too; let's hope the second letter is as tedious as the first.

It was indeed, and even worse. What he was copying out seemed so absurd to him that he proceeded simply to copy line by line, paying no attention to the meaning.

This is even more pompous, he said to himself, than the official documents of the Treaty of Munster that my diplomacy instructor made me copy out when I was in London.

Just then he suddenly remembered the letters from Madame de Fervaques; he had forgotten to return the originals to the solemn Spaniard, Don Diego Bustos. He searched for them; they were really almost as nonsensical as the ones the young Russian nobleman had written. They were stunningly vague. They said everything and nothing at all. It's like the Aeolian harp of style, thought Julien. Amid all these lofty thoughts on nothingness, on death, on the infinite, etc., the only real thing I can detect is a grotesque fear of being ridiculed.

This interior monologue, which we have summed up here, was repeated every night for two weeks in a row. Falling asleep while transcribing a sort of commentary on the Apocalypse, going out the next to deliver the letter with a melancholic air, riding the horse back to the stable with the hope of catching a glimpse of Mathilde's gown, working, appearing at the Opéra on the evenings that Madame de Fervaques did not come to the Hôtel de La Mole—such were the monotonous events in the life of Julien. Life had more interest when Madame de Fervaques did come to visit the marquise, because then he could steal a look, under the side of the maréchale's hat, at the eyes of Mathilde, and then he became eloquent. His picturesque and sentimental epigrams began to turn somewhat more striking, somewhat more elegant.

He was acutely aware that he appeared absurd in Mathilde's eyes, but he wanted to impress her with the elegance of his diction. The falser the things I say, the more she'll like me, Julien thought; and then, with a shocking boldness, he would exaggerate certain elements of nature. He quickly understood that if he didn't want to appear vulgar to the maréchale, he must never allow himself to say anything simple or reasonable. And so he went on, sometimes abridging his amplifications when he read either success or indifference in the eyes of the two ladies he had to please.

Overall, his life had become less awful than it had been when he was less active.

But, he thought one evening, here I am transcribing the fifteenth of these abominable dissertations; the first fourteen were all faithfully remitted to the

maréchale's porter. I'm going to have the honor of filling up every single pigeonhole in her desk. But she continues to treat me exactly the way she did when I didn't write her! What's the end of all this going to be? Will my faithfulness end up boring her as much as it does me? You have to admit that the Russian friend of Korasoff, the one pursuing the beautiful Quaker in Richmond, was a disaster; nobody could possibly be more deadly.

But like all the mediocre creatures whom Chance puts in the presence of the maneuvers of a great general, Julien didn't understand anything about the siege mounted by the young Russian against the affections of the beautiful Englishwoman. The first forty letters were calculated only to obtain her forgiveness for the boldness of writing to her. The necessary first step was to get this sweet young woman, who was perhaps infinitely bored with her life, into the habit of receiving letters that might be just a little less insipid than that daily life.

One morning, Julien received a letter. He recognized the crest of Madame de Fervaques, and he tore open the envelope with an alacrity that he would have thought impossible just a few days ago: but it was only an invitation to dinner.

He immediately consulted Prince Korasoff's instructions. Unfortunately, the young Russian, trying to maintain a touch as light as Dorat's, was unclear just where he ought to have been most clear.<sup>187</sup> Julien couldn't divine what sort of role he ought to be playing at the maréchale's dinner.

Nothing could have been more magnificent than her drawing room, gilded like the Galerie de Diane in the Tuileries, with oil paintings in the panels. But there were strange blank spots in those paintings. Julien would learn later on that the mistress of the house had deemed some of the subjects in the paintings indecent, and she had them "corrected." *Oh, our moral century!* thought Julien.

He recognized, in the drawing room, three of the people who had been present at the meeting concerning the secret note. One of them, Monseigneur the bishop of \*\*\*, uncle to the maréchale, was in charge of the list of ecclesi-

astical positions, and was a man who, they said, could refuse nothing to his niece. What enormous strides I've made, thought Julien, with a melancholy smile, and how little it matters to me! Here I am dining with the famous bishop of \*\*\*.

The dinner was mediocre, and the conversation worse. This is like the table of contents for a bad book, thought Julien. You see all the greatest thoughts of humankind proudly displayed there. But then you listen for three minutes, and you ask yourself which was more striking, the speaker's bombast or his abominable ignorance.

The reader has probably forgotten all about that little man of letters named Tanbeau, the nephew of the academician and a future professor, who, with his base calumnies, seemed to be in charge of poisoning the atmosphere at the Hôtel de La Mole.

This was the little man who first hinted to Julien that Madame de Fervaques, even though she never replied to his letters, might not be averse to indulging the sentiment that gave rise to them. The black soul of Monsieur Tanbeau was devastated over Julien's success. But when you look at it from another point of view, a man of merit cannot, any more than a fool, be two places at once, and therefore, if Sorel were to become the sublime maréchale's lover, the future professor said to himself, she'll get him some splendid place in the Church, and I'll be rid of him at the Hôtel de La Mole.

Father Pirard also gave Julien long sermons concerning his successes at the Hôtel de Fervaques. There was sectarian jealousy between the stern Jansenist and the Jesuit, revivalist, and monarchical salon of the virtuous maréchale.

# MANON LESCAUT

*Now, when he was finally convinced of the Prior's utter stupidity and foolishness, he got along quite well just by calling black white and white black.*

LICHTEMBERG<sup>188</sup>

The Russian instructions laid it down categorically that one must never contradict aloud the person to whom one was writing. Under no circumstances was one ever to abandon the attitude of ecstatic admiration; the letters, of course, always began with this assumption.

One evening at the Opéra, in the box of Madame de Fervaques, Julien praised the ballet of *Manon Lescaut* to the skies.<sup>189</sup> His sole reason for doing so was that he found it utterly uninteresting.

The maréchale replied that the ballet was much inferior to the novel by the abbé Prévost.

What! thought Julien, surprised and amused, a person of such exalted virtue praising a novel! At least two or three times a week, Madame de Fervaques could be heard expressing the greatest disdain for those writers who, by means of their inane works, seek to corrupt a young generation that is—alas!—only too prone to being led astray by the senses.

“Now within that immoral and dangerous class of books,” the maréchale continued, “*Manon Lescaut* occupies, I am told, one of the highest places. The failings and the well-merited sufferings of the truly criminal heart are, they say, depicted in that novel with truth and some depth. But none of that prevented your Bonaparte on Saint Helena from declaring that it was a book written for servants.”

This reactivated all Julien's mental forces. Somebody has been trying to hurt me in the maréchale's eyes. They've told her about my enthusiasm for

Napoleon, and it's irritated her sufficiently to get her to yield to the temptation of letting me feel it. This discovery kept him amused all throughout the evening, and it made him amusing too. As he was taking his leave of the maréchale in the vestibule of the Opéra, "Consider, Monsieur," she said to him, "anyone who loves Napoleon must not love me. At best, one can accept him as a necessity imposed on us by Providence. And anyway, the man lacked a soul pliant enough to appreciate true artistic masterpieces."

*Must not love me!* Julien repeated to himself; that may mean nothing, and it may mean everything. There are mysteries of language in this place that are unknown to us poor provincials. And he went on to think at length about Madame de Rênal as he copied out an immense letter for the maréchale.

The next day, she said to him, with an air of indifference that he considered unconvincing, "How is it that you speak to me of *London* and *Richmond* in the letter that you wrote last night, or so it seems, after leaving the Opéra?"

Julien's embarrassment was overwhelming; he had copied out the letter line by line, and evidently forgot to substitute *Paris* and *St. Cloud* for *London* and *Richmond*. He began to reply two or three different times, but was unable to complete a sentence; he felt he was on the verge of bursting out into insane laughter. But eventually, by dint of searching for words, he hit upon this idea: "Exalted by our most sublime discussions, touching on topics of the greatest import for the human soul, mine—as I wrote to you—must have undergone a moment's distraction."

I've managed to create an impression, he said to himself, and I can therefore spare myself the tedium of the rest of the evening. He left the Hôtel de Fer-vaques almost running. Later that evening, having a second look at the letter he had copied the night before, he came to the fatal passage where the young Russian had mentioned London and Richmond. Julien was surprised to find the letter almost tender.

It was the contrast between the apparent lightness of his talk and the sublime, almost apocalyptic profundity of his letters that had made her take notice of him. The length of his sentences especially pleased the maréchale; this is



not the flighty style popularized by that Voltaire, that grossly immoral man! Although our hero did everything he possibly could to remove all traces of any good sense from his conversation, it nonetheless retained a certain antimonarchical, almost impious coloring to it, a fact that did not escape the notice of Madame de Fervaques. Surrounded by eminently moral people who, however, often didn't have so much as a single idea pass through their minds throughout an entire evening, the lady was powerfully struck by anything that seemed even a little new. But at the same time, she thought she owed it to herself to be offended by it. She thought that such a failing bore, as she called it, *the imprint of the frivolity of our era* . . .

But salons like hers are only worth visiting when one is in quest of something. The reader must be feeling something of the same boredom Julien was, leading this unvarying life day after day. These are the flat country, the dull plains of our journey together.

During the whole time that Julien's life had been usurped by the Fervaques episode, Mademoiselle de La Mole had to make a serious effort to keep herself from thinking about him. Violent conflicts played out in her heart: sometimes she thought she had succeeded in despising that sad young man; but despite herself, his conversation captivated her. What especially surprised her was his perfect duplicity; he never said a word to the maréchale that wasn't a lie, or at least an appalling travesty of his real thoughts, which Mathilde knew very well, on practically every subject. This Machiavellianism fascinated her. What a deep man he is! she thought. How different from these other pompous nitwits, or the vulgar cheats like that Tanbeau, who speaks the same language!

Still, Julien experienced some horrible days. It was only to perform his most painful duties that he appeared every evening in the drawing room of the maréchale. The effort needed to continue playing this role sapped all his emotional strength. Often at night he would cross the enormous courtyard in front of the Hôtel de Fervaques, and he only kept from sinking fully into despair by sheer force of character and by reasoning with himself.

I conquered despair at the seminary, he told himself, and look at the hideous future I thought I had before me then! I would either make my fortune or fail to, but in either case I saw myself condemned to passing the rest of my life in intimate contact with everything under the sun that was most detestable and most disgusting. And the following spring, just eleven short months later, I was, perhaps, the happiest of all the young men of my age.

But it often happened that this positive reasoning was of no use in the face of the ghastly reality. Every day he saw Mathilde, at luncheon and at dinner. From the numerous letters that Monsieur de La Mole dictated to him, he knew she was getting very close to marrying Monsieur de Croisenois. Already that pleasant young man was beginning to show up twice a day at the Hôtel de La Mole: the jealous gaze of a jilted lover never missed a single move of his.

When he thought he had seen Mademoiselle de La Mole treating her intended with special kindness, Julien would come back to his room and look lovingly at his pistols.

Oh, I'd be so much wiser, he said to himself, to remove all the identifying marks from my linen and go off into some solitary forest, twenty leagues from Paris, and put an end to this vile existence! No one in the area would know me, and my death would be a secret for a couple of weeks, and after a couple of weeks, who would even think about me?

This was sound reasoning. But the next day, catching a glimpse of Mathilde's bare arm, between her sleeve and glove, would be enough to plunge our young philosopher into cruel memories—and crueler because they kept him attached to this life. All right, he would say to himself then, I'll play this Russian scheme out to the end. And how will it end?

As for the *maréchale*, after sending her the fifty-three letters, I most certainly will not write any more.

As for Mathilde, either these six weeks of painful playacting will fail to appease her rage, or they'll win me maybe a moment of reconciliation. Great God! I'd die of happiness! And he was unable to continue his thought.

When, following a long moment of reflection, he was able to regain his reasoning powers: At that point, he said to himself, I'd manage to have a day of

bliss, after which her harshness would start up all over again, based, no doubt about it, on my very limited ability to please her, and then I'd be left with no resources at all. I'd be ruined, lost, forever . . .

What possible guarantee could she offer me, with a character like hers? Alas, it's my lack of merit that's the key to it all. My manners will lack elegance, my speech will be awkward and monotonous. Great God! Why am I me?

## 29

# BOREDOM

*Sacrificing yourself to your passions, fine.  
But to passions that you don't even feel!  
O, miserable nineteenth century!*

GIRODET<sup>190</sup>

Having read Julien's long letters at first without taking any special pleasure in them, Madame de Fervaques now began to take interest. But there was one thing that simply devastated her: what a pity that Monsieur Sorel is not a priest! One could admit a priest to a certain degree of intimacy, but wearing that cross and that almost bourgeois suit of his, he exposes one to some cruel questions, and how is one to answer them? She did not quite finish her thought: what if some malicious friend assumes, and then spreads the rumor, that he is some little cousin of no rank, a relative of my father, some merchant who managed to get decorated by the National Guard!

Up until she met Julien, the greatest pleasure in Madame de Fervaques's life was writing the word *Maréchale* before her name. But after that, the sickly vanity of the social climber, ready to take offense at anything, had to do battle with this new and growing interest.

It would be so easy for me, thought the *maréchale*, to get him made a vicar-

general in some diocese near Paris! But just “Monsieur Sorel,” and even worse, “secretary to Monsieur de La Mole”! It’s simply terrible.

For the first time, this soul who *feared everything* was moved by something unrelated to her pretensions to rank and social superiority. Her old porter noticed that whenever he brought in a letter from that young man who looked so sad, he would be sure to see vanish the distant, discontented expression that the maréchale always put on when one of her servants entered the room.

Now, being bored with a way of life whose sole aim was to impress any audience, and without feeling any true, deep enjoyment when she succeeded, had become so intolerable once she had begun thinking of Julien, that if her maids were to escape ill treatment for a whole day, all it took was for her to have spent an hour the previous evening with that young man. His credit with her had withstood some anonymous letters, and very well-written ones at that. In vain had little Tanbeau furnished Messieurs de Luz, de Croisenois, and de Caylus with two or three skillfully designed calumnies that those gentlemen were delighted to spread around without taking much trouble to determine their truth-value. The maréchale, not the type who can easily resist such underhanded practices, took her doubts to Mathilde and came away consoled.

One day, after inquiring for the third time whether any letters had come for her, Madame de Fervaques suddenly decided she would write to Julien. Boredom was at the root of this victory. By the time she was writing her second letter, though, the maréchale almost ground to a halt when she thought how indecorous it was, having to write so vulgar an address on an envelope as “To Monsieur Sorel, c/o Monsieur le Marquis de La Mole.”

That evening she said to him, in her most peremptory manner, “You must bring me some envelopes with your address already written on them.”

Ah, so now I’m her servant, thought Julien, and he proceeded to amuse himself by screwing his face up the way the old valet of the marquis, Arsène, did.

That same evening he brought the envelopes, and quite early the next day he received his third letter from her. He read the first five or six lines, and the last two or three toward the end. She had written four pages in a tiny, crowded script.

Bit by bit, she formed the agreeable habit of writing him almost every day. Julien responded with careful copies from the Russian collection, and such is the power of the bombastic style: Madame de Fervaques was not at all surprised to find that the replies made no references to her own letters.

And the reader can imagine how badly her pride would have been wounded if someone like little Tanbeau, who had appointed himself the official spy, keeping close watch on everything Julien did, had informed her that all these letters, their seals unbroken, had been tossed in a heap in one of Julien's drawers.

One morning, the porter went to the library where Julien was working to deliver him a letter from the maréchale; Mathilde ran into the man, and looking down, saw the letter and the address, written in Julien's hand. She went into the library as the porter was leaving; the letter remained on the edge of Julien's desk while he, busy with his work, didn't even bother to put it in a drawer.

"This is something I cannot tolerate!" cried Mathilde, snatching up the letter. "You're forgetting about me altogether, and I happen to be your wife. Your behavior is disgusting, Monsieur!"

And with that, her pride, so shocked by how horrifically inappropriate her outburst was, overwhelmed her; she burst into tears, and Julien suddenly thought she was going to suffocate.

Surprised and confounded, Julien couldn't quite understand how it was that this scene was about to be something wonderful and fortunate for him. He helped Mathilde to a chair; she almost let herself melt in his arms.

As he felt her relaxing, his first reaction was supreme joy; his second was to think of Korasoff: I could lose everything with a single word.

He made his arms rigid, painfully trying to keep to the strategy. I dare not even allow myself to press this supple, beautiful body closer to me, or she'll despise me and mistreat me. What an impossible character the woman has!

And as he cursed Mathilde's character, he loved her a hundred times more for it; he felt as if he were holding a queen in his arms.

The impassive coolness of Julien doubled the suffering caused by the wounded pride of Mademoiselle de La Mole. She was far from being com-

posed enough to divine in his eyes what his true feelings were for her at this moment. She could not even bring herself to look at him; she shuddered, fearing his expression would be one of scorn.

Sitting on the library's sofa, immobile, her head turned away from Julien, she was in the grip of the worst suffering that pride and love can inflict on a human heart. Oh, what a terrible thing she had let herself do!

It was my destiny, wretch that I am, to see my advances, my most indecent advances, repulsed, and repulsed by whom? Her outraged, half-mad pride answered for her: by one of my father's servants!

"This is something I will not tolerate!" she said aloud.

And getting up in a fury, she opened the drawer of Julien's desk, just a few feet away. She stood there seeming frozen in horror at the sight of nine or ten letters lying there unopened, all just like the one the porter had brought in. She recognized Julien's handwriting in all the addresses, only slightly disguised.

"So," she cried, beside herself, "you've not only made a conquest of her, but you even despise her. You, a nobody, despising the Maréchale de Fervagues!

"Oh, forgive me, my love," she added, throwing herself down on her knees. "Despise me if you will, but love me. I can't live without your love any longer." And now she fell into a faint.

There she is—the proudest creature—at my feet! said Julien to himself.

## 30

# A BOX AT THE OPERA BOUFFE

*As the blackest sky*

*Foretells the heaviest tempest.*

**DON JUAN, CANTO I, STANZA 73**

Amid all these sudden, startling events, Julien felt more stunned than happy. Mathilde's insults showed him how wise the Russian's scheme really was. *Be as silent as possible, and as still as possible*—that's my one path to salvation.

He helped Mathilde up, and without saying a word put her back onto the sofa. Soon her tears returned.

To conceal her embarrassment, she gathered up the letters from Madame de Fervaques. She slowly opened them. She gave a nervous start when she recognized the maréchale's handwriting. She turned the pages without reading; most of the letters were six pages long.

"Answer this for me, at least," Mathilde finally said in an imploring voice, not daring to look at Julien. "You know how proud I am; it's the great misfortune of my social position, and even of my character, I admit it. And Madame de Fervaques evidently has stolen your heart from me . . . But has she made all the sacrifices to you that this fatal love has led me to make?"

A solemn silence was Julien's only response. What right does she have, he thought, to ask me to commit an indiscretion unworthy of any decent man?

Mathilde tried to read the letters; her eyes brimmed with tears, making reading impossible.

For the last month she had been miserable, but that haughty soul of hers would never let her avow her feelings to herself. It was just chance that brought on this outburst. For one moment, her jealousy and her love won out over her pride. She was seated on the sofa, very close to him. He looked at her hair, at her alabaster neck; for a moment he forgot his plan, and he passed one arm around her waist, pressing her closely up against his chest.

Slowly, she turned her head toward him; he was startled by the depth of the grief he saw in her eyes, so different from her usual expression that it made her almost unrecognizable.

Julien felt his strength beginning to drain away, so mortally painful was it to keep up the courage he had demanded of himself.

Those eyes soon enough will be expressing nothing but icy disdain, Julien told himself, if I give in and let myself be carried away by the joy of loving her. But now she was declaring, in a faint voice, barely able to complete the words

she was uttering, how deeply she regretted the foolish steps her pride had counseled her to take.

“I have pride too,” Julien said, barely audibly, his features expressing the extreme limit of physical exhaustion.

Mathilde turned quickly toward him. Hearing his voice was a happiness she had almost given up hope of obtaining. At this moment she could only curse her pride, and wish she could find some unexpected, incredible means of proving to him how much she adored him and detested herself.

“And it’s probably because of that pride,” Julien continued, “that you even took any notice of me in the first place. Certainly, it’s because of this firmness and courage, befitting a man, that you have any esteem for me now. I may be in love with the *maréchale* . . .”

Mathilde shuddered; her eyes took on a strange expression. She was about to hear her doom. The change was not lost on Julien; he felt his courage weakening.

Oh, he said to himself, listening to the sound of the empty words he was speaking as if they were emanating from somewhere else, if only I could cover those pale cheeks with kisses, without you feeling it!

He continued: “I may be in love with the *maréchale* . . .” and now his voice grew ever fainter, “but I certainly have no strong proof of her interest in me, no decisive proof . . .”

Mathilde looked at him. He endured that gaze, hoping at least that his face did not betray him. He felt penetrated by love right down to the deepest furrows of his heart. Never had he adored her as he did now; he was almost as mad as Mathilde. If she could have managed to find enough composure and courage to make it happen, he would have fallen at her feet, renouncing all this foolish playacting. Ah, Korasoff, he said to himself inwardly, why aren’t you here now! How badly I need just a word or two from you to tell me how to conduct myself! Meanwhile, he was saying to her:

“Apart from any other feelings, gratitude would be enough to attach me to the *maréchale*; she’s been so indulgent to me, and she’s given me such consolation when others despised me . . . I shouldn’t have absolute faith in certain



signs she's given me, very flattering ones no doubt, but perhaps equally short lived."

"Oh, great God!" cried Mathilde.

"Well, what guarantee can you offer me?" said Julien sharply and firmly, seeming to abandon for a moment his prudent and diplomatic approach. "What guarantee can you give, what god can promise me that you'll feel the same way about me two days from now?"

"Only my extreme, excessive love, and my misery if you no longer love me," she said, taking his hands in hers and turning toward him.

The sudden movement she made displaced her cape; Julien caught sight of her charming bare shoulders. Her hair, in some disarray too, now brought an intense, sensual memory rushing back to him . . .

He was on the edge of giving in. One unwise word, he said to himself, and I'll be right back in that long procession of days in despair. Madame de Rênal would find reasons to do what her heart was urging her to. But this girl from the great world only allows her heart to feel when she has found good reasons why it ought to feel.

He saw that truth suddenly, in a flash, and in a flash he recovered his courage too.

He withdrew his hands from Mathilde's tight grasp, and with a show of marked respect, he moved back and a little away from her. There is no greater courage a man can have. He busied himself next with stacking up all of Madame de Fervaques's letters, which had been scattered on the couch, and it was still with the appearance of extreme politeness, cruel politeness, that he added:

"Mademoiselle de La Mole will please give me some time to reflect on all this." With that he stood up and walked swiftly out of the library; she heard him closing the successive doors on his way.

The monster isn't even perturbed, she said to herself . . .

But what am I saying, "monster"? He's wise, he's prudent, he's good. I'm the one who's done more wrong than anyone could imagine.

And that way of looking at things endured. Mathilde was almost happy that

day, immersed as she was in love; you would have said that this heart had never been agitated by pride—and such pride!

She shuddered with horror when, in the drawing room that evening, a servant announced Madame de Fervaques; even the man's voice sounded sinister. She could not bear the sight of the *maréchale*, and she rapidly left the room. Julien, his self-esteem having improved very little after his painful triumph, feared that the look in his own eyes would give him away, and did not dine at the Hôtel de La Mole.

His love—and his happiness—both expanded quickly as the morning's battle receded into the past, but he had already begun criticizing himself. How on earth did I manage to resist her? he asked himself. What if she stopped loving me? All it takes to alter that arrogant heart of hers is a moment, and anyone would have to say that I treated her horribly.

He understood very well that he had to make an appearance that evening at the Opéra Bouffe, in the box of Madame de Fervaques. She had expressly invited him: Mathilde would certainly find out whether he had been present or rudely absent. Despite how convincing this reasoning was, he didn't have the strength in the early part of the evening to go out into society.

Ten o'clock struck; now, he simply had to make an appearance.

Fortunately, he found the box of the *maréchale* filled with women, and he had to stand at the back, near the door, completely hidden by all the hats. Being concealed like that saved him from ridicule, because the divine music of Caroline's despair in the *Matrimonio segreto* made him burst into tears.<sup>191</sup> Madame de Fervaques noticed the tears. They made so powerful a contrast with the masculine strength his face usually projected that the great lady's soul, which had been steeped for so long in all that was most corrosive in a social climber's ambitions, was actually moved. The little of woman that remained in her heart impelled her to speak. She wanted the pleasure of hearing the sound of his voice.

"Have you seen the de La Mole ladies?" she asked him. "They're up in the third row of boxes." Julien immediately bent forward, leaning somewhat im-

lately over the front railing of the box; he saw Mathilde. Her eyes were shining with tears.

And it's not their regular day for the Opéra, Julien thought; such eagerness!

Mathilde had talked her mother into coming to the Bouffes, despite the inconvenience of having to occupy an inferior box (which had been enthusiastically offered to them by one of the lesser habitués of the family). She wanted to see if Julien would spend the evening with the maréchale.

## 31

# MAKING HER AFRAID

*So, then, this is the finest miracle of your civilization:  
You've turned love into something ordinary.*

**BARNAVE**

Julien rushed over to the box of Mademoiselle de La Mole. The first things he saw were the tear-filled eyes of Mathilde; she was weeping openly. The only other people in the box were of subordinate rank, the woman friend who had lent her the box and some acquaintances of hers. Mathilde reached out to take Julien's hand; she had evidently abandoned all fear of her mother. Almost choking with tears, she could only say one thing to him: "*guarantees!*"

No matter what, I mustn't speak to her, Julien told himself, though he was strongly moved himself, and covering his eyes as if to shield them from the bright light from the chandelier that hangs close by the third row. If I speak, she'll be able to tell how much I'm feeling; the sound of my voice will betray me, and I'll lose everything all over again.

His struggles now were even worse, even more painful than those in the morning, for his heart had had time to become deeply stirred. He feared seeing

Mathilde's vanity reasserting itself. Utterly intoxicated with love and with sensual desire, he made a mighty effort not to speak to her.

If you ask me, this is one of the finest traits in Julien's character. A person capable of making such an effort with himself can go far, *si fata sinant*.<sup>192</sup>

Mademoiselle de La Mole insisted on Julien accompanying them back to the Hôtel. Fortunately, there was a heavy rain. But the marquise had Julien sit across from her, speaking constantly to him, keeping from being able to say a word to her daughter. One would have thought the marquise was trying to ensure Julien's happiness; now that he no longer feared losing everything through an excess of emotion, he gave himself over to it in a kind of frenzy.

Do I dare mention that, upon entering his room, Julien went down on his knees and covered with kisses the love letters given him by Prince Korasoff?

"O great man! How much I owe you!" he cried in his frenzy.

Bit by bit he regained his composure. He compared himself to a general who just won a major battle. I've got an immense advantage, true, he said to himself, but what will tomorrow bring? Everything can still be lost in a single moment.

With passion, he opened his volume of *Memoirs Dictated at Saint Helena*, by Napoleon, and for two long hours he forced himself to read. He was only reading with his eyes, but no matter; he forced himself to continue. During this strange reading session, his head and heart, unbeknownst to him, ascended to the level of all that is good and great and were working away there. This woman's heart is very different from Madame de Rênal's, he said to himself, but he went no further.

MAKE HER AFRAID, he cried suddenly, throwing the book away from him. The enemy will obey me only insofar as I inspire fear. Otherwise, it will despise me.

He paced rapidly back and forth in his little room, drunk with joy. But to tell the truth, all this happiness arose out of pride, not out of love.

Make her afraid! he repeated to himself proudly, and he had reason to be proud. Even in her happiest moments, Madame de Rênal always doubted that

my love was the equal of hers. But here, I have a demon to subjugate, so that's what I must do: *subjugate*.

He knew with certainty that come eight o'clock in the morning, Mathilde would be in the library; he didn't appear until nine, on fire with love but with his head dominant over his heart. He didn't let a minute pass without repeating to himself: Keep her constantly in that one great doubt, "does he love me?" Her brilliant social position, all the flattery that surrounds her every day will make her *a little too* inclined to reassure herself.

He found her pale and calm, seated on the sofa, but evidently unable to make the slightest movement. She held out her hand:

"My friend, I've offended you, I know. You might very well be angry with me."

Julien had not expected a simple tone like this. He was very close to betraying himself.

"You want guarantees, my dear friend," she added after a silence she had hoped he would break. "That's fair. Run away with me. Let's go to London . . . I'll be lost forever, my honor gone . . ." She had strength enough to take her hand out of Julien's and cover her eyes. All the deep feelings of modesty, of feminine virtue had come rushing back into her heart . . . "Very well! Dishonor me," she said with a sigh; "that will be the *guarantee*."

Yesterday I was happy because I had the courage to be stern with myself, thought Julien. After a moment of silence, he gained enough control over his heart to say, in a glacial tone of voice:

"And once we're on the road to London, once you've lost your honor, to use your own expression, how can I be sure that you'll love me? That my presence in the coach with you won't seem an annoyance? I'm not a monster, so having ruined your reputation would only be one sorrow the more for me. It's not your social position that's the obstacle; unfortunately, it's your own character. Can you really promise yourself that you'll love me a week from now?"

(Oh, if she were to love me for just one whole week, Julien was saying to himself, I could die happy. What would I care about the future, what would I

care about life? And to think that this happiness could begin this very instant if I want it to. It depends solely on me!)

Mathilde saw that he was thinking.

“So, I’m entirely unworthy of you,” she said, taking his hand.

Julien embraced her, but immediately he felt the iron hand of duty gripping his heart. If she sees how much I adore her, I’ll lose her. And before withdrawing from her arms, he had already resumed all the dignity that befits a man.

That day and the following ones, he contrived to hide the intensity of his bliss; there were moments when he even refused himself the pleasure of holding her in his arms.

At other times, the delirium of happiness overcame all the counsel that prudence tried to offer.

A bower of honeysuckle in the garden, designed to conceal the ladder, was the spot where Julien used to stand in order to gaze from afar at the window of Mathilde, weeping over her inconstancy. A great oak grew nearby, and its trunk concealed him from being seen by any indiscreet eyes.

Passing this spot with Mathilde brought vividly back to him the extreme nature of his suffering; the contrast between that past despair and his present happiness was too much for him. Tears flooded his eyes, and as he took his love’s hand to his lips, he said, “This is where I lived, thinking of you. From here, I looked up at your window, waiting for the happy moment when I might be able to see this beloved hand open it . . .”

He broke down completely. He described for her, in those true colors in which there is no invention, the excess of his despair then. Short, broken utterances testified to his present happiness, which had finally put an end to that hideous suffering . . .

What am I doing, great God! Julien thought, coming back to himself suddenly. I’m losing everything.

His alarm was so great that he thought he could already read a lessening love in the eyes of Mademoiselle de La Mole. That was an illusion, but Julien’s face underwent a rapid change, taking on a deathly pallor. His eyes seemed to

go dull for a moment, and now an expression of arrogance, in which there was some cruelty, replaced that look of true, unconstrained love.

“What’s wrong with you, dear?” Mathilde asked, with tender concern.

“I’m lying,” said Julien angrily, “and I’m lying to you. I’m angry with myself, because God knows I respect you enough not to lie to you. You love me, you’re devoted to me, and I don’t need to make up fine flowery phrases just to please you.”

“My God! Those were just fine phrases, everything you were saying to me for the last few minutes?”

“And I’m very angry with myself for it, my dear friend. I composed all that long ago for some woman who loved me, and who bored me . . . This is a fault in my character, and I reproach myself. Please forgive me.”

Bitter tears flowed down Mathilde’s cheeks.

“Whenever some little thing happens to upset me, I drift right into a kind of involuntary daydream,” Julien continued. “My damned memory, which I’m cursing as we speak, brings something back to me as a resource, and I proceed to misuse it.”

“That must mean that I’ve done something to displease you, without knowing it,” said Mathilde, with a charming innocence.

“One day, I remember, walking by these honeysuckles, you plucked a flower. Monsieur de Luz took it from you, and you let him keep it. I was just a few feet away.”

“Monsieur de Luz? No, that’s not possible,” replied Mathilde with the superior tone that came so naturally to her. “I don’t do things like that.”

“I’m quite sure of it,” Julien replied sharply.

“Well then, it must be true, my dear,” said Mathilde, lowering her eyes sadly. She was absolutely certain she had not allowed Monsieur de Luz to do any such thing for the past several months.

Julien looked at her with inexpressible tenderness: No, he said to himself, she doesn’t love me any *less*.

She reproached him that evening, laughingly, for his attraction to Madame

de Fervaques: “Think of it: a bourgeois in love with a social climber! Hearts like hers are probably the only ones my Julien can’t bring to life. She’s turned you into a real dandy,” she said as she toyed with his hair.

During the period he believed Mathilde detested him, Julien had become one of the best-dressed men in Paris. But he had one major advantage over the other men of that genre: once he was dressed, he thought no more about it.

One thing vexed Mathilde: Julien continued copying out the Russian letters and sending them to the maréchale.

## 32

# THE TIGER

*Alas! Why these things, and not others?*

**BEAUMARCHAIS, LE MARIAGE DE FIGARO (V.3)**

An English traveler tells the story of having lived in close proximity to a tiger. He had raised it, and he liked petting and stroking it, but he always kept a loaded pistol nearby.

Julien never allowed himself to feel the extremity of his happiness except in times when Mathilde would be unable to read the expression in his eyes. He continued following his duty by making it a point of addressing a harsh word to her from time to time.

When Mathilde’s gentle sweetness (which he observed with astonishment) and her extreme devotion were on the point of making him lose his self-control, he had the courage to get up and leave her abruptly.

For the first time, Mathilde really was in love.

Life, which had always moved at a tortoise’s pace for her, now seemed to fly by.

But since letting her pride come to the surface in some way was necessary,



she wanted to expose herself boldly to all the risks love was making her run. Julien was the one who showed prudence; but whenever there was some danger involved, she did not comply with his prudent wishes. Submissive and almost humble with him, she exhibited only more arrogance in her dealings with anyone who came near her in the house, whether family or servants.

In the evenings, in the drawing room, among sixty guests, she would call Julien over to speak with him alone and at length.

Little Tanbeau sat down near them one evening, and she asked him to go to the library to fetch the volume of Smollett that dealt with the Revolution of 1688.<sup>193</sup> When he hesitated, “I do hope you’re not too busy,” she added in an insultingly imperious tone (which was balm for Julien’s soul).

“Did you see the look in that little monster’s eyes?” he asked her.

“His uncle has put in ten or twelve years of service in this house, and if it weren’t for that I’d have him thrown out on the spot.”

Her behavior toward Messieurs de Croisenois, de Luz, etc., though perfectly polite in terms of form, was scarcely any less provocative in substance. Mathilde now reproached herself for all the confidences she had made about them to Julien, and even more because she dared not admit to him that she had exaggerated the almost totally innocent signs of interest she had shown in those gentlemen.

Despite her very finest resolutions, her feminine pride kept her from admitting to Julien: it was because I was talking about it to you that I took any pleasure in not withdrawing my hand from the marble table when Monsieur de Croisenois rested his on the table and let it brush up against mine.

Now, whenever one of those gentlemen had been speaking with her for a few moments, she found she had some question she needed to ask Julien, which was the pretext she used for keeping him by her side.

She found that she was pregnant, and she came to Julien with joy to tell him the news.

“Do you still doubt me now? Isn’t this a guarantee? I’m your wife now, forever.”

Julien’s astonishment at this announcement was profound. He almost forgot

the principle he had adopted for guiding his behavior. "How can I be deliberately cold and hurtful toward this poor girl who's ruining herself for me?" If she looked at all unwell, even on days when prudence and wisdom were trying to make their dreadful voices heard, he couldn't find the courage to utter one of those cruel phrases that, in his view, were indispensable to the continuation of their love.

One day Mathilde said, "I'd like to write to my father. He's been not just a father to me but a friend, too, and therefore I think it's unworthy of you and me to deceive him, even if it's only for a short while."

"Good God! What are you going to do?" exclaimed Julien, alarmed.

"My duty," she replied, her eyes shining with joy. She saw herself as more magnanimous than her lover.

"But he'll throw me out of the house in disgrace!"

"He has the right to do that, and we must respect that right. I'll take your arm, and the two of us will walk out together, right through the front door, in broad daylight."

A startled Julien begged her to put it off for a week.

"I can't," she replied. "It's a matter of honor. I've seen my duty, and I must do it, without hesitation."

"Very well: I order you to put it off," Julien said at length. "Your own honor is safe; I am your spouse. This enormous step is going to change everything for both of us. I have my rights too. Today is Tuesday; next Tuesday is the Duc de Retz's day. That evening, when Monsieur de La Mole comes back home, the porter will hand him the fatal letter . . . He's always hoped to see you made a duchess; imagine how miserable this will make him!"

"Do you mean, 'imagine what vengeance he'll take'?"

"I can feel pity for my benefactor, feel sorry for hurting him, but I don't fear and never will fear any man."

Mathilde gave in. Since she had announced her condition to Julien, this was the first time he'd spoken to her with authority; never had he loved her so much. The more tender part of him was pleased that Mathilde's condition could be used as an excuse for not saying harsh things to her. The thought of confessing

the truth to Monsieur de La Mole worried him greatly. Would he be separated from Mathilde? And though his departure would grieve her, would she still even think of him a month later?

He dreaded almost as much the reproaches the marquis would quite justly heap upon him.

That evening, he admitted this second source of anxiety to Mathilde, and then, carried away by his love, he went on to confess the first as well.

She reddened.

“Really?” she said. “Six months without me would be misery for you?”

“An immense misery, the only thing in the world that fills me with terror.”

Mathilde felt a great happiness. Julien had played his role so carefully and consistently that he had convinced her that, between the two of them, she was the one more deeply in love.

The fatal Tuesday came at last. At midnight, upon coming home, the marquis found a letter addressed to him, indicating he was to open it himself, and read it only when there were no witnesses present.

*Dear Father,*

*All social ties between us are broken; all that remains are the bonds of nature. After my husband, you are, and will always be, the one dearest to me. My eyes are filled with tears as I think of the pain I'm about to cause you; but so that my shame will not be made public, and to allow you enough time to act, I could no longer put off confessing what I must to you. If your affection for me, which I know is very deep, would allow you to grant me a small pension, I'll go off and settle wherever you think best, Switzerland, for example, with my husband. His name is obscure enough that no one there would recognize that it's your daughter who is Madame Sorel, the daughter-in-law of a Verrières carpenter. There it is—the name it was so difficult for me to write. I fear, for Julien's sake, your anger, which at first must seem justified. I won't be a duchess, Father, but I knew that when I fell in love with him—for it was I who took the first steps in love; I'm the one who seduced him. I inherited from you and from our ancestors a soul too elevated to be taken in or fascinated by*

anything vulgar.<sup>194</sup> It was out of a desire to please you, though in vain, that I gave any thought to Monsieur de Croisenois. Oh, why did you put real merit before my eyes? You said it yourself when I returned from Hyères: "This young Sorel is the only person I find amusing." The poor boy is as upset as I am, if that's possible, about the pain this letter will cause you. I know that I can't help your being angry with me as a father; but do continue to love me as a friend.

Julien respected me. If he did speak to me from time to time, it was only because of the deep gratitude he felt toward you: you know that the natural pride in his character would keep him from responding in anything but a professional manner to anything so far above him. He has a keen, deep-seated awareness of the difference in our social stations. It was me, even though I blush as I admit it to my very best friend: I was the one who pressed his arm one day in the garden.

Twenty-four hours from now, why should you be angry with him? My fault cannot be undone. If you insist, I'll be the one to speak for him and convey to you his deep respect and his despair at displeasing you. You'll never see him again; but I will rejoin him, wherever he goes. It's his right, and my duty; he is the father of my baby. If your generosity could allow us six thousand a year to live on, I would accept it with gratitude; otherwise, Julien will set up in Besançon as a teacher of Latin and literature. However low his origins, I am confident that he will rise up high. With him, I have no fear of obscurity. If there is a revolution, I'm sure he will play an eminent role in it. Could you say as much for any of the men who have been seeking my hand? Oh, they have fine estates, but I don't see anything to admire in that. My Julien would rise to a high position even under the present regime, if he had a million and the protection of my father ...

Mathilde, who knew that the marquis was a man who reacted quickly, had written eight pages.

What should I do? Julien thought while Monsieur de La Mole was reading the letter. What is (a) my duty and (b) in my best interests? My debt to him is immense; without him, I'd have been some miserable subordinate, not even

enough of a rogue to be hated and persecuted. He's raised me up and given me a place in society. Because of him, my necessary acts of underhandedness will be (a) rarer and (b) less ignoble. And that's worth more than if he'd given me a million. I owe him this cross, and the diplomatic services I've done, which have given me distinction.

If he took up his pen to tell me how I ought to conduct myself, what would he write?

Julien was abruptly interrupted by Monsieur de La Mole's old valet.

"The marquis wishes to see you this minute, whether you're dressed or not."

The valet added in a low voice as he walked along beside Julien, "He's beside himself. Be careful."

### 33

## THE HELL OF THE WEAK

*In cutting this diamond, the inept jeweler deprived it of some of its brightest glints. In the Middle Ages—what am I saying?—even under Richelieu, the Frenchmen had some strength of will.*

MIRABEAU

Julien found the marquis in a rage: for the first time in his life, perhaps, this lord was guilty of bad taste; he hurled every insult he could think of at Julien. Our hero was surprised, impatient, but his sense of gratitude remained unshaken. After all, think how many long-cherished projects dear to the heart of this poor man have been shattered in an instant! But I must reply to him; staying silent will only increase his wrath. The response came courtesy of the role of Tartuffe:

"*I am not an angel . . .*"<sup>195</sup> I have served you well, and you've rewarded me generously . . . I was grateful, but I am also twenty-two . . . In this household, the only two who understood my thinking were you and this lovable person . . ."

"Monster!" cried the marquis. "Lovable! Lovable! The first day you found her lovable you ought to have fled."

"I tried to. That was when I asked you to let me go to Languedoc."

Tired of pacing the room in a rage, the marquis, overcome by grief, threw himself into an armchair. Julien heard him mutter to himself, "This is not at all an evil man."

"No, I'm not—not where you're concerned," cried Julien, falling to his knees. But he felt an immediate flush of shame at doing this, and he quickly stood back up.

The marquis felt utterly lost. At the sight of Julien's gesture he started in again, hurling the kind of foul insults worthy of a cab driver. The novelty of such terms was perhaps a little distraction for him.

"What? My daughter to be called Madame Sorel? My daughter—never to be a duchess?" Those two ideas continued to present themselves as linked together, and every time it was torture for the marquis; his emotions were entirely out of his control. Julien was afraid he was about to be beaten.

When lucid intervals came, as the marquis slowly became accustomed to the reality of this misfortune, he made more rational reproaches to Julien.

"You should have fled, Monsieur," he said to him. "It was your duty to flee. You are the worst of men . . ."

Julien went over to the table and wrote.

*For a long while now my life has become unendurable, and I now wish to bring it to an end. I beg Monsieur le Marquis to accept, with my expression of my boundless gratitude, my apologies for any embarrassment my death in his house might cause.*

"Will Monsieur le Marquis please deign to look over this page . . . Kill me," said Julien, "or have your valet do it. It's one in the morning, and I'll go walk in the garden, close to the wall."

“Oh, go to the devil!” the marquis shouted as he left.

I understand, Julien thought. He wouldn’t be upset if I were to spare his valet the task of putting me to death . . . Let him kill me, that’s fine, it’s a satisfaction I can offer him . . . But damn it, I love life . . . And I owe it to my son.

That idea, appearing for the very first time in a clear form for his imagination, occupied his mind entirely after the first few minutes of pacing in the garden, which had been devoted to feeling the danger he was in.

But now this new interest turned him into a more prudent sort of creature. I need some advice to help me deal with that hot-headed man . . . He’s irrational, and he’s capable of anything. Fouqué is too far away, and anyway he wouldn’t understand the feelings of a man like the marquis.

Comte Altamira . . . Could I be sure of his total silence? I can’t let looking for advice turn into some act that complicates my situation. Well, there’s no other choice, I’m afraid, but the somber Father Pirard . . . His thinking is all narrow and constrained by Jansenism . . . Some rogue of a Jesuit who knows the ways of the world would be better for my case . . . Monsieur Pirard is capable of beating me as soon as he hears of my crime.

The genius of Tartuffe again came to Julien’s aid: All right, I’ll go confess to him. That was the final resolution he had come to when he left the garden after two long hours. He wasn’t thinking anymore of being shot at; sleep was overpowering him.

Very early on the following morning, Julien was several leagues from Paris, knocking at the door of the stern Jansenist. He was greatly startled to find that the priest wasn’t particularly surprised by his admission.

Perhaps I should blame myself, the abbé thought, more concerned than angry. He said, “I suspected something like this love affair. My affection for you, you poor little wretch, kept me from saying anything to her father . . .”

“What do you think he’ll do?” Julien interrupted, impatiently.

(He loved the abbé at this moment, and any kind of scene would have been terribly painful for him.)

“I can see three possibilities,” Julien continued: “One. Monsieur de La Mole could have me killed,” and with that he told the priest about the suicide letter

he had shown the Marquis. “Two. He can have me shot dead by Comte Norbert, who’ll ask me for a duel.”

“And you’d accept?” asked the abbé, furious, rising up out of his chair.

“Let me finish. Of course, I would never fire at the son of my benefactor.

“Three. He can send me away. If he says to me, ‘Go to Edinburgh or New York,’ I’ll obey. Then they could hush up Mademoiselle de La Mole’s situation, but I will not allow them to do away with my child.”

“And exactly that, you can count on it, will be the first idea that occurs to that morally corrupt man . . .”

In Paris, Mathilde was in a state of despair. She had seen her father at seven. He showed her Julien’s letter, and now she was trembling in fear that he would think ending his life was the noblest thing to do. But without seeking my permission? she asked herself in a grief that was in large part anger.

“If he is dead, then I will die,” she said to her father. “And it’ll be you who caused his death . . . Maybe you’ll even rejoice over it . . . But I swear to his departed spirit that I’ll wear mourning and call myself Madame Sorel, widow. And I’ll send out announcements about it, you can count on that . . . You’ll find that I’m neither cowardly nor weak.”

Her love was driving her to a state of madness. Now it was Monsieur de La Mole’s turn to be dumbfounded.

He started viewing events in the light of reason. At luncheon, Mathilde was absent, and the marquis felt a tremendous weight lifted off him, and even felt flattered, when he realized she had said nothing of it to her mother.

Around noon, Julien returned. The sound of his horse’s hooves echoed in the courtyard.<sup>16</sup> He dismounted. Mathilde called for him, and she threw herself into his arms, almost right in front of her maid. Julien didn’t appreciate this rapturous greeting; he had come from his long meeting with Father Pirard in a more diplomatic, calculating mood. His imagination was exhausted from thinking through all the possible outcomes. Mathilde, tears in her eyes, informed him that she had seen his note about suicide.

“My father’s attitude might change. Please indulge me in this—go off right away to Villequier. Get on your horse and go before they get up from the table.”



Seeing Julien continue to seem surprised and cold, she burst into tears again.

“Let me manage things here,” she cried with emotion, holding him tightly in her arms. “You know how little I’m willing to be parted from you. Write to me through my chambermaid, and disguise your handwriting on the address. I’ll write volumes back to you. Adieu now! Flee!”

That last word felt insulting to Julien, but he obeyed. It seems to be fated, he thought, that these people, even in their best moments, will always find some way of offending me.

Mathilde resisted, with firmness, all her father’s *prudent* solutions. She would negotiate nothing, insisting on these points: She would be Madame Sorel, and would live in poverty with her husband in Switzerland, or here in Paris with her father. She rejected any proposition involving a clandestine confinement. “That would only lead to calumny and dishonor. Two months after our marriage, I’ll travel with my husband, and it will be easy enough then to make it seem as if my son was born at an appropriate date.”

Though her firmness at first only enraged the marquis, at length it began to inspire some doubt in him.

In one gentler, emotional moment: “Here!” he said to his daughter. “Here’s a certificate for ten thousand a year. Send it off to your Julien and have him hurry up to make it impossible for me to change my mind.”

In order to *obey* Mathilde, knowing how much she loved giving orders, Julien had traveled forty leagues for no reason. He was at Villequier, going over some of the farmers’ accounts; this bequest from the marquis was the occasion for his return. He went to seek asylum with Father Pirard who, during his absence, had become Mathilde’s most effective ally. Every time the marquis asked him, he would demonstrate to him how anything other than a public marriage would be a crime in the eyes of God.

“And in this case,” added the priest, “worldly wisdom is perfectly in agreement with religion. Consider the fiery character of Mademoiselle de La Mole: could you possibly count, even for a moment, on her maintaining secrecy, especially if she had not imposed it upon herself? If you don’t allow this to go forward openly as a public marriage, society will keep on talking about this

strange misalliance. Everything must be stated outright, all at once, with neither the appearance nor the reality of any kind of mystery.”

“That seems true enough,” said the marquis, pensively. “If we were to handle it this way, after three days, the only ones still talking about the marriage would be the empty-headed chatterboxes. The best thing would be to have it take place right when there’s some great anti-Jacobin government initiative, so the wedding could slip by incognito in its wake.”

Two or three friends of Monsieur de La Mole thought the same way as Father Pirard. In their eyes, the big obstacle was the very unyielding character of Mathilde. But even after so much thoughtful counsel, the marquis could not, deep down, reconcile himself to giving up on his hopes for a *tabouret* for his daughter.<sup>197</sup>

His memory and his imagination now kept returning to all the different sorts of cunning, treacherous acts that were still possible in his youth. To bow to necessity, to fear the law seemed an absurd, dishonorable thing for a man of his rank. He was paying now, and dearly, for all those enchanting fantasies he had permitted himself to entertain about what his beloved daughter’s position would be ten years from now.

Who could have foreseen this? he asked himself. A girl with so imperious a character, with such a well-trained mind, prouder even than I am of the name she bears! A girl whose hand some of France’s most illustrious men have sought from me!

All you can do is abandon all prudence. This century was made for throwing everything into confusion! We’re marching straight into chaos.

# AN INTELLIGENT MAN

*The Prefect, trotting along on his horse, said to himself: Why shouldn't I be Minister, President of the Council, Duke? Here is how I'll wage my battle . . . This is how I'll get the innovators clapped in chains.*

## THE GLOBE

There is no rational argument strong enough to break down ten years of pleasant fantasies. The marquis realized that it was unreasonable to be angry, but he could not bring himself to forgive. From time to time, he said to himself, if this Julien were to die in some kind of accident . . . And thus his grieving imagination took solace in chasing after the most absurd chimeras, and the latter acted to paralyze all the wise advice Father Pirard tried to give. A month passed by in this way without any movements in the negotiations.

In this family affair—just as in those in the political world—the marquis had brilliant moments of insight that kept him enthusiastic for about three days. At those times, he would reject some suggested course of action even though it was founded on sound arguments; the arguments would appeal to him only if they seemed to support his current favorite plan. For three days he would work with the passion and enthusiasm of a poet to bring things to a certain point, and then the next day he would forget all about it.

Julien at first was disconcerted by the marquis's long delay, but after a few weeks he began to realize that Monsieur de La Mole had no definite plan.

Madame de La Mole and everyone else in the house thought that Julien had gone off to the provinces to see to the administration of the country estates; but he was actually hidden away at Father Pirard's presbytery and seeing

Mathilde nearly every day. She would spend an hour each morning with her father, but sometimes whole weeks would pass without either of them saying anything about the matter that was occupying all their thoughts.

“I don’t want to know where that man is,” the marquis said one day. “Send him this letter.” Mathilde read:

*The Languedoc estates bring in 20,600 francs. I give 10,600 to my daughter, and 10,000 to Monsieur Julien Sorel. To be clear, I am gifting the estates themselves. Tell the lawyer to draw up two separate deeds of gift, and have them brought to me tomorrow; after that, no further dealings between us. Oh, Monsieur, how could I have expected something like this?*

*The Marquis de La Mole*

“Oh, thank you very much,” said Mathilde happily. “We’ll go settle in the Aiguillon château, between Agen and Marmande. They say the countryside there is just as beautiful as it is in Italy.”

This gift was a great surprise to Julien. He was no longer the stern, cold man we knew. The future of his son was now the main thing he thought about. This unexpected fortune, considerable enough for such a poor man, made him ambitious. He now saw himself and his wife with an income of 36,000. But on Mathilde’s side, her adoration for her husband was the primary thing—for her pride loved using that term for Julien, *husband*. Her great ambition, really her only one, was to have her marriage recognized. She spent her days exaggerating to herself how wise she was to link her destiny to that of a superior man. In her mind, personal merit was all the fashion.

Their almost continuous separation, the multiplicity of business matters, and the little time they had available to talk about love all combined to complete the good work of the clever strategy Julien had been using.

At last, Mathilde became impatient at seeing so little of the man she had genuinely come to love.

In a fit of bad temper, she wrote to her father, beginning her letter with an echo of *Othello*:<sup>198</sup>

*That I have preferred Julien to the pleasures that society offered to the daughter of Monsieur le Marquis de La Mole, my choice of him stands as sufficient proof. Those pleasures involving social status and petty vanity mean nothing to me. It is now six weeks since I've been separated from my husband. That's enough to demonstrate my respect for you. Before this coming Thursday, I will leave my paternal home. Your gifts have enriched us. No one knows my secret apart from the respectable Father Pirard. I'll go to him; he'll marry us, and within an hour after the ceremony, we'll be on our way to Languedoc, and we will never return to Paris unless you order us to. But what pierces me to the heart is that all this will end up being a spicy little anecdote, told at my expense and at yours. And won't a joke produced by a stupid public force our excellent Norbert to seek a duel with Julien? I know him, and I know that I'd have no power to influence him in a situation like that. The rebellious plebeian in him would come out. I beg you on my knees, my father! Come and attend our wedding, in the church of Father Pirard, next Thursday. That will soften the edge of any gossip, and it will ensure the continued lives of both your only son and my husband, etc., etc.*

This letter threw the marquis into a strange embarrassment. He was going to have to *make up his mind* at last. All his little habits, all his ordinary friends had lost their influence.

In these new, unusual circumstances, his deepest character traits, imprinted there by the events of his youth, resumed their total sway over him. The misfortunes of the Émigrés had made him a man of imagination. For two years he had enjoyed an enormous fortune and all the distinctions a man could have at court, when 1790 put an end to that and hurled him into the horrible hardships of the Emigration. That harsh school changed the character of the twenty-two-year-old. He was firmly planted, so to speak, amid his great wealth, but he was not ruled by it. But if his imagination preserved his soul from being sickened with the gangrene of gold, it also had made him prey to a mad passion to see his daughter decorated with a grand title.

During the six weeks that had just passed, the marquis had at one point had

a whim to enrich Julien. Poverty seemed shameful to him, dishonorable for himself, Monsieur de La Mole, and impossible for his daughter's spouse, so he threw money his way. The next day his imagination went off in a new direction, and he thought Julien would understand the mute subtext of this generous gift of money and would go off and change his name, exile himself to America, and write to Mathilde that he had died for her . . . Monsieur de La Mole imagined this letter already written, and he set about tracing its impact on the character of his daughter . . .

But the day Mathilde's *real* letter pulled him up out of these childish day-dreams, after first thinking for a long while about killing Julien or making him disappear, he went on to fantasize about creating a brilliant fortune for him. He had him take the name of one of his estates, and indeed, why shouldn't he arrange it so that his peerage would pass to Julien on his death? The Duc de Chaulnes, his father-in-law, had already mentioned several times, after his only son had been killed in Spain, that he wanted to pass on his own title to Norbert . . .

You can't deny that Julien has an extraordinary ability when it comes to business, and a boldness about it too—maybe even a *brilliance*, the marquis said to himself. But there's something deep down in the basis of his character that frightens me. He makes that impression on everybody else, too, so there must be something real about it (and the harder it was to put his finger on it, the more it alarmed the old marquis).

My daughter put it very well the other day (in a letter we have omitted):

"Julien belongs to no salon, no particular set." He hasn't established relationships with anyone who'll side with him against me . . . But could that be due simply to ignorance about how society works? Two or three times I've said to him: "The only realistic way of getting ahead is through the salons" . . .

No, he's not the skillful, shrewd schemer, the little lawyer type who'll never miss a minute or a chance . . . There's no Louis XI about him.<sup>199</sup> But on the other hand, there's something very ungenerous about some maxims I've heard from him . . . I don't know what to think . . . Does he repeat maxims like those to himself to act as a kind of *seawall* to dam up his passions?

Well, the one thing certain is that he can't take being scorned, and that's where I've got the upper hand with him.

He doesn't believe in the religion of high birth; he doesn't respect us instinctively. That's a fault, but after all, the only thing the soul of a seminarian should be unable to tolerate is the lack of comfort and money. He's different, very different; he can't endure scorn at any price.

Forced by his daughter's letter, Monsieur de La Mole saw the necessity of making a decision. This is the real question: was Julien emboldened to be so audacious as to court my daughter because he knew I love her more than anything, and because I have an income of a hundred thousand écus?

Mathilde insists the answer is no . . . No, Monsieur Julien, this is a point about which I wish to have no illusions.

Was it real, unexpected love? Or just a vulgar desire to raise himself up to a fine social position? Mathilde is very insightful; she knew at once that such a suspicion would ruin his chances with me, and that's why she made that confession: she's the one who fell in love first . . .

But a girl of so high a character so far forgetting herself as to make the first advance! Pressing his arm in the garden, one evening . . . It's terrible! As if she hadn't a hundred other, less indecent ways of communicating her attraction to him.

*To excuse is to accuse:* I don't trust Mathilde . . . That day, the marquis's thinking was more conclusive than usual. Habit, though, carried the day, and he resolved to gain some time and write to his daughter. They communicated with each other from one side of the house to the other by letters; Monsieur de La Mole didn't dare discuss these things face-to-face with Mathilde. He was afraid he would end up making some sudden concession.

Letter

*Be sure you don't commit any new acts of folly; enclosed is a commission as Lieutenant of Hussars for Monsieur le Chevalier Julien Sorel de La Vernaye. You see what I am doing for him. Don't vex me, and don't ask questions. He should go within the next twenty-four hours in order to report to his regiment in Strasbourg. Here is a warrant from my banker. Obey me.*

Mathilde's love and joy had never been this boundless. She wanted to capitalize on the triumph, so she replied immediately:

*Monsieur de La Vernaye would be at your feet, overcome with gratitude, if he knew what you are so good as to be doing for him. But in the midst of all this generosity, my father seems to have forgotten me; the honor of your daughter is in danger. One indiscretion can leave an everlasting stain, which even an income of twenty thousand écus could not erase. I'll send this on to Monsieur de La Vernaye, but only if you will give me your word that my marriage will be celebrated in public within the next month, at Villequier. And please don't delay, because it won't be long after this month that your daughter will be unable to appear in public unless her name is changed to Madame de La Vernaye. And oh, I do thank you, dear Papa, for saving me from the name of Sorel.*

His reply was unexpected:

*Obey me, or I'll take it all back. You should be trembling, you foolish girl. I still don't know what kind of man your Julien really is, and you yourself know even less than I do. Have him depart for Strasbourg, and you'd better walk the straight and narrow. I'll let you know my decision in two weeks.*

Such a severe response surprised Mathilde. "I don't know what kind of man your Julien really is": that phrasing plunged her into a reverie that soon came to the most enchanting of possibilities, but she believed them to be true. My Julien's thinking has never swathed itself in the little, mean *uniform* of salon society, and my father doesn't believe in his superiority, precisely because of what proves it . . .

Nevertheless, if I don't obey this whim of his, I can envision a public scene; a scandal reduces my standing in society, and that in turn could make me less lovable in the eyes of Julien. After the scandal . . . poverty for ten years, whereas the madness of choosing a husband on the basis of his merit can only escape ridicule if it is accompanied by the most brilliant opulence. And if I go to live far away from my father, at his age, he could forget about me . . . Norbert will



marry some pleasant and shrewd woman: the aged Louis XIV was seduced by the Duchesse de Bourgogne<sup>200</sup> . . .

She decided to obey, but not show the letter to Julien; its fierce tone might lead him to some unwise reaction.

That evening, when she informed Julien that he was to be a lieutenant in the Hussars, he was overjoyed. The reader can imagine it, given the ambition that had driven his whole life, and now given the new passion he felt about his son. The change of name struck him with astonishment.

So, after all, he thought, the novel of my life comes to a conclusion, and all the credit goes solely to me and my efforts. I'm the one who managed to make this monster of pride love me, he added, gazing at Mathilde. Her father can't live without her, and she can't live without me.

## 35

# A STORM

*Dear God, give me mediocrity!*

MIRABEAU

He was preoccupied; he scarcely responded to the warm tenderness she showed for him. He remained silent and somber. Never had Mathilde thought he looked so grand, so worthy of love. But she feared that there might be some subtlety at work in his sense of pride that would upset the whole arrangement.

Almost every morning, she saw Father Pirard arrive at the house. Could Julien have possibly got some insight from him as to her father's intentions? Perhaps the marquis himself, in a moment of caprice, had written to him? After such great good news, what could account for Julien's severe demeanor? She dared not ask him.

She *dared not*! She, Mathilde! And at that moment, something entered into

her feelings for Julien—something vague, unforeseen, something almost like terror. That dry, meager soul of hers felt all the passion that can be felt by a creature brought up in the midst of the kind of excessive civilization that Paris so admires.

Early the next morning, Julien was at Father Pirard's presbytery. Post horses were trotting into the courtyard, drawing a beat-up chaise, hired from the nearest posthouse.

"A vehicle like this is no longer suitable," said the stern old priest in an annoyed tone. "Here are twenty thousand francs, a gift to you from Monsieur de La Mole. He expects you to spend it within the coming year, but you are to try not to do anything too ridiculous." (A sum like that tossed freely to a young man—in the priest's view, it could only be an occasion for sin.)

"The marquis also said, 'Monsieur Julien de La Vernaye will have been given this money by his father, a man I need not identify any more specifically. Monsieur de La Vernaye will no doubt think it proper to make a present to one Monsieur Sorel, a carpenter in Verrières, who cared for him when he was a child . . .' I can see to that part of the commission," the priest added. "I've finally persuaded Monsieur de La Mole to come to a settlement with the priest Frilair, the mighty Jesuit. His influence is simply too strong for us. The implicit recognition of your noble birth by this man who rules over Besançon is one of the tacit clauses in the settlement." Julien could not contain his delight, and he embraced the priest; he was to be recognized.

"Enough!" said Father Pirard, pushing him away. "What's the point of all this worldly vanity? . . . Now as to Sorel and his sons, I'll offer them an annuity of five hundred francs, to be paid to each separately, as long as I'm satisfied with them."

Julien had recovered his coolness and his hauteur. He thanked him, using terms that were vague and that didn't commit him to anything. It might even be true, he was thinking, that I really am the illegitimate son of some great lord who went into exile in our mountains during the time of the fearsome Napoleon. With each passing second, the idea became even more plausible . . .

In that case, my hatred for my father would actually be a piece of proof . . . And I wouldn't be a monster anymore!

A few days after this monologue, the fifteenth Regiment of Hussars, one of the army's most brilliant units, was drawn up in battle formation on the parade ground in Strasbourg. Monsieur le Chevalier de La Vernaye rode the finest horse in Alsace, which had cost him six thousand francs. He was received as a lieutenant, without ever having served as a sublieutenant except on the rolls of a regiment nobody had ever heard of.

His impassive expression, the stern, almost wicked look in his eyes, his pallor, his unflappable composure won a reputation for him on the first day. And it was not long before his perfectly calibrated politeness, his skill with pistols and sword, which he demonstrated without undue affectation, eliminated any idea of joking out loud about him. After hesitating for five or six days, public opinion in the regiment declared itself in his favor. This young man has everything, said the sarcastic older officers, except youth.

From Strasbourg, Julien wrote to Father Chélan, the one-time curé of Verrières who was now approaching old age:

*You will have rejoiced, no doubt, at hearing about the events that have led my family to make me a rich man. Here are five hundred francs, which I ask you to distribute quietly and without any mention of my name, for the unfortunates who are poor now, as I was then, and whom you are undoubtedly helping, just as you once helped me.*

Julien was intoxicated with ambition, not with vanity; he always gave primary importance to external appearances. His horses, his uniforms, the livery of his servants were all scrupulously maintained with the kind of care that would have done credit to some great English lord. Having been made a lieutenant as a favor, and for only two days now, he was already planning to become commander in chief by thirty at the latest, and he felt it was essential that he, at twenty-three, should quickly become something more than a lieutenant. He could think of nothing but glory and his son.

It was right in the midst of these absurdly unbridled fantasies of ambition that he was surprised to see before him a young footman from the Hôtel de La Mole, who had arrived as a courier. Mathilde had written:

*All is lost; hurry, return as quickly as possible, sacrifice everything, desert if you must. As soon as you're here, meet me in a cab outside the little gate to the garden at number \*\*\* on rue \*\*\*. I'll come out to speak to you; maybe I can get you inside the garden. Everything is lost, and I don't think there's any remedy; but count on me, you'll find I'm devoted and steadfast in adversity. I love you.*

It took Julien only a few minutes to get permission from his colonel, and he left Strasbourg at full gallop. But the hideous anxiety that gnawed at him wouldn't let him continue this way past Metz. There he threw himself into a post chaise, and with almost incredible speed he arrived at the indicated meeting spot, outside the little gate to the garden of the Hôtel de La Mole. The gate opened, and Mathilde immediately, forgetting all the rules of decency, rushed into his arms. Fortunately, it was only five in the morning, and the street was still deserted.

"All is lost. My father was afraid of facing my tears, so he went away Thursday night, but where to, nobody knows. Here's his letter: read it." And she got up into the cab with Julien.

*I could have pardoned everything, but not the scheme to seduce you because you're rich. And that, you unhappy girl, is the unfortunate reality. I give you my word of honor that I will never consent to a marriage with that man. I'll promise him ten thousand francs a year if he'll agree to move far away, outside of France, preferably America. Read the letter I've just received as a result of my making inquiries. That impudent scoundrel himself suggested I write to Madame de Rênal. I will never again read one single line from you regarding this man. I'm horrified right now by Paris, and by you. I entreat you to keep the impending event as close a secret as possible. If you break off firmly with this vile man, you will regain a father.*

“Where is the letter from Madame de Rênal?” asked Julien.

“Here. I didn’t want to show it to you until you were prepared.”

Letter

*What I owe to the sacred cause of religion and morality forces me, Monsieur, to take the painful step I am about to take with you; a rule that can never be broken requires that I must never do anything to hurt another, unless it is to prevent some greater scandal. The sorrow I feel in writing this is less strong than my sense of duty. It is only too true, Monsieur, that the behavior of the person you’ve asked me about might appear hard to explain, and even perfectly honorable. Some might think it best to conceal or disguise certain aspects of the situation; prudence and even religion might counsel it. But this conduct that you wish to learn about has in fact been extremely reprehensible—more than I can even express. Being poor and eager for gain, this man employed the most consummate hypocrisy to seduce a weak, unfortunate woman, hoping through that to gain a position for himself and to become somebody. It is part of my painful duty to add that I have been forced to conclude that Monsieur J\*\*\* has no religious principles. And my conscience obliges me to think that one of his methods of succeeding within a household is to try to seduce the woman who has most influence there. Papered over with a facade of disinterestedness, and using flowery phrases from novels, his great and indeed only object is to succeed in overthrowing the master of the house and getting control of his fortune. He leaves in his wake misery and eternal regret, etc., etc., etc.*

This letter, extremely long and partly effaced by tears, was undoubtedly in Madame de Rênal’s hand; it was even written with more care than was usual with her.

“I can’t blame Monsieur de La Mole,” said Julien when he had finished reading. “He is only just and prudent. What father would give his daughter to such a man! Farewell!”

Julien leaped down out of the cab and ran back to his post chaise, which was waiting for him at the end of the street. Mathilde, whom he seemed to

have forgotten entirely, took a few steps forward as if to follow him, but the stares of the merchants who were beginning to arrive at their shops, and who were people she knew, compelled her to turn and hurry back into the garden.

Julien was on his way to Verrières. On that rapid journey, he was unable to write to Mathilde, as he had intended to do; his hand formed only illegible scrawls on the paper.

He arrived in Verrières on a Sunday morning. He went into the shop of the local gunsmith, who showered him with compliments about his recent good fortune. Everyone all over town was talking about it.

Julien had trouble getting the man to understand that he wanted to purchase a pair of pistols. The gunsmith, at his request, loaded both pistols.

The *three bells* sounded; this signal is well known in all the villages of France, for after the various peals of the morning, these three bells announce that Mass is about to begin immediately.

Julien entered the new Verrières church. All the building's tall windows were screened by crimson curtains. Julien stopped a few paces behind Madame de Rênal's pew. He thought she looked as if she were praying fervently. The sight of that woman he had once loved so much made Julien's arm tremble so badly that at first he could not carry out his intention. I can't do it, he said to himself, Physically, I can't do it.

Just then the young priest saying the Mass rang the bell for the Elevation. Madame de Rênal bowed her head, for a moment almost entirely concealing it in the folds of her shawl. Julien no longer recognized her as clearly. He fired one shot at her and missed; he fired a second time, and she fell.

## SAD DETAILS

*Don't expect any weakness on my part. I am avenged.  
I deserve to die, and here I am. Pray for my soul.*

SCHILLER

Julien stood there motionless, seeing nothing. When he came to himself a little, he could see all the parishioners fleeing the church; the priest had left the altar. Julien turned and began slowly following a group of women who were screaming as they went. One woman, trying to escape faster than the others, pushed against him rudely, and he fell down. His feet got caught in a chair that had been knocked over by the rushing crowd. As he stood up, he felt himself being held tightly around the neck; it was a gendarme in full uniform arresting him. Mechanically, Julien tried to get hold of his pistols; but a second gendarme held him by the arms.

He was taken to the prison. They took him in a room where he was put in handcuffs and then left alone; the door was locked on him, the key turning twice. All this took place very swiftly, and it made little impression on him.

"Well, well, it's all over now," he said aloud, coming back to his senses. "Yes, the guillotine in two weeks . . . or else kill myself here."

Without thinking any further than that, he realized his head felt like it was being gripped tightly. He looked around to see if there was anyone there holding him. A few minutes later, he fell into a deep sleep.

Madame de Rênal had not been mortally wounded. The first bullet had pierced her hat; as she turned, the second shot was fired. The bullet had struck her shoulder from which—amazingly—it had rebounded off the bone and struck one of the Gothic pillars, knocking off a big chunk of stone.

When, after the long, painful procedure of dressing the wound, the surgeon, a solemn man, said to Madame de Rênal, I'm as sure of your life as I am of my own, she was deeply distressed.

She had been looking forward to death for a long time. The letter that her current confessor had ordered her to write to Monsieur de La Mole had been the last blow the creature could take, weakened as she was by such long sorrow. Her illness was in fact Julien's absence, though she herself called it *remorse*. The confessor, a young cleric, virtuous and fervent, newly arrived from Dijon, was not fooled by the term.

To die like this, not by my own hand—that's no sin, Madame de Rênal thought. God will perhaps pardon me for rejoicing over my death. She dared not add: And to die by Julien's hand is the height of happiness.

As soon as she was rid of the surgeon's presence, and all her friends had come crowding around her, she called for her maid Élisabeth. "The jailer," she said to her, blushing deeply, "is a cruel man. He'll undoubtedly mistreat him, thinking I'd want him to . . . but I find that thought intolerable. Couldn't you go, as if it were just something you wanted to do, and give the jailer this little envelope, containing a few louis? You can say that religion forbids him to mistreat him . . . But it's crucial that he doesn't say anything about having been given this money."

And these details will serve to explain the humanity with which Julien was treated by the jailer of Verrières; this was still Monsieur Noiroud, the impeccable servant of the administration, the one we saw earlier being thrown into such a fright by the presence of Monsieur Appert.

An examining magistrate appeared in the prison. "I've committed premeditated murder," Julien said to him. "I bought my pistols and had them loaded at the gunsmith's shop of Monsieur So-and-so. Article 1342 of the Penal Code is perfectly clear: I deserve the death penalty, and I expect it." The magistrate, befuddled and made suspicious by this kind of response, tried to ask a whole series of questions to see if he could *trip up* the accused.

"But don't you see," Julien said with a smile, "I'm just as guilty as you could possibly wish me to be. Go on, go on, Monsieur. You're not going to be cheated of your prey. You'll have the pleasure of seeing me condemned. Spare me your presence."

Julien thought, I have one more tedious duty to carry out; I must write to Mademoiselle de La Mole.



*I've had my revenge, he wrote. Unfortunately, my name will be in all the papers, so I won't be able to make my escape from this world incognito. Please forgive me for that.<sup>201</sup> I'll be dead within two months. This revenge was terrible, like the misery of being separated from you. From this moment on, I'm going to forbid myself to write or pronounce your name. Never speak about me, even to my son; silence is the only way to honor me. To ordinary people, I'll be just a common murderer . . . Allow me to speak the truth in this supreme moment: you'll forget about me. This enormous catastrophe, which I hope you'll never talk about to any living soul, will exhaust for many years those too-romantic, too-adventurous traits I've observed in your character. You were made to live among the heroes of the Middle Ages; show, now, that you have the same kind of strength that they had. Let what must happen soon take place in secrecy and without compromising yourself in any way. You must assume a false name and confide in no one. If you absolutely have to have a friend's help, I bequeath Father Pirard to you.*

*Don't speak to anyone else, and above all not to the people of your own class—like de Luz, de Caylus.*

*A year after my death, marry Monsieur de Croisenois; I implore you to do this, and in fact I order you to, as your spouse. Do not write to me; I won't reply. Although I'm not really as evil as Iago, at least I don't think so, I'll say as he did: From this time forth, I never will speak word.<sup>202</sup>*

*No one will see me either speaking or writing; you now have my last words, along with my last act of adoration.*

J.S.

It was only after sending off this letter that Julien, having recovered himself somewhat, now for the first time truly sank into unhappiness. Every single thing his ambition had ever made him hope for was about to be wrenched away from him, and all by that single great statement: I'm going to die. Death itself was not a *horror* to him. His whole life had been nothing but a long preparation for misfortune, and he had never kept himself from contemplating the misfortune called the greatest of them all.

Well! he said to himself, if in two months I were going to fight a duel with some man better with weapons than I, would I be so weak as to constantly think about it with fear in my heart?

He spent an hour trying to get a better understanding of himself from this new perspective.

When he had looked deeply and clearly into his soul, and when the truth appeared to him as firm and obvious as one of the pillars in his cell, he thought about remorse.

Why should I feel any? I was wronged, and atrociously. I've killed, I deserve to die, but that's all. I'll die having settled my accounts with humankind. I'll leave behind no unfulfilled obligation, and I'm in debt to no one. The only thing shameful about my death will be the instrument that brings it about: and that, most assuredly, will be plenty for my shame in the eyes of the Verrières bourgeois. But from an intellectual point of view, what could be more despicable? I do still have one way to earn some distinction in their eyes: I could throw out gold coins to the onlookers on my way to the scaffold. Then my memory would be associated with *gold*, and that would make it resplendent to them.

After completing that thought, which after a moment seemed conclusive to him: I have nothing else left to do on earth, he said to himself, and he fell into a deep sleep.

About nine in the evening, the jailer woke him up, bringing him some supper.

"What are they saying in Verrières?"

"Monsieur Julien, the oath I swore on the crucifix, on the day I was installed in my office, obliges me to keep silent."

He said no more—but he continued to stand there. The sight of such vulgar hypocrisy amused Julien. I really must, he thought, keep him waiting as long as I can for the five francs he's hoping for in order to sell out his conscience.

When the jailer saw Julien finish the meal without offering any temptations:

"The friendship I bear to you, Monsieur Julien," he said in a sweet, phony voice, "compels me to speak. But they might claim that speaking is against the interests of justice, because something I say could help you in your defense . . .

Monsieur Julien, who's a good sort of boy, will surely be happy to hear me tell him that Madame de Rênal will recover."

"What? She's not dead?" cried Julien wildly.

"You didn't know?" exclaimed the jailer, whose stupidly gaping expression quickly turned into one of delighted greed. "I think it would be only right for Monsieur to give a little something to the surgeon who, according to both law and justice, should not have spoken. But just to please Monsieur, I went to his house myself, and he told me everything . . ."

"All right, but you say the wound isn't mortal," Julien said impatiently. "Will you vouch for that on your life?"

The jailer, a six-foot-tall giant of a man, nonetheless took fright and retreated toward the door. Julien saw that he needed to change his approach if he were to get at the truth, so he sat back down and tossed a gold napoleon to Monsieur Noiroud.

The more the man's tale convinced Julien that Madame de Rênal's wound was not fatal, the more he felt tears coming to overwhelm him.

"Go away," he said suddenly.

The jailer obeyed. As soon as the cell door was shut: "Great God! She isn't dead!" cried Julien, and he fell to his knees, weeping hot tears.

In that moment of extremity, he became a believer. All the hypocrite priests—they don't matter. Can they lessen, even a little, the truth and the sublimity of the idea of God?

And only then did Julien begin to repent of his crime. By coincidence, which saved him from despair, only then did that state of physical irritation and of semimadness, which had plagued him all the way from Paris to Verrières, begin to dissipate.

His tears flowed from a free, generous source; he entertained no doubts about the condemnation that awaited him.

So she'll live! he said to himself . . . She'll live to pardon me, and to love me . . .

The next morning, late, when the jailer came to awaken him:

"You must have a great heart, Monsieur Julien," the man said. "I came in

two different times, and I didn't want to wake you! Here are two bottles of excellent wine, sent to you by Father Maslon, our priest."

"What—that scoundrel is still here?" said Julien.

"Yes, Monsieur," said the jailer, lowering his voice. "But don't say things like that out loud; it could end up doing you harm."

Julien burst into laughter.

"Friend, given the situation you see me in, the only person who could do me harm is you, if you were to stop being gentle and humane . . . And you'll be well paid," Julien added, interrupting himself and resuming a superior air. That air immediately was justified by the gift of a little money.

Monsieur Noiroud went on to narrate in great detail everything he had learned concerning Madame de Rênal, but he said nothing about Éliisa's visit.

The jailer was the lowest, most servile kind of man possible. A thought crossed Julien's mind: This deformed giant must make three or four hundred francs a year, because the prison doesn't get much use. I could promise him ten thousand if he would escape with me to Switzerland . . . The hard part would be convincing him of my good faith. The idea of a long conversation about it with so vile a creature disgusted Julien so that he dropped it and thought of other things.

But by that night, the chance had passed. A post chaise came to pick him up at midnight. He was perfectly happy with the two gendarmes, his traveling companions. In the morning, when he arrived at the Besançon prison, they were kind enough to lodge him in the upper floor of a Gothic dungeon. He guessed that the architecture dated from the fourteenth century; he admired the grace and airy elegance of the place. There was a narrow gap between two walls on one end of a large courtyard, and through it he caught a glimpse of a superb vista.

On the following day he was questioned, and after that he was left alone for several days. His soul was calm. His situation seemed perfectly simple to him: I intended to kill, so I must be killed.

But his thoughts did not stop to linger on the subject. The trial, the annoyance of having to appear in public, his defense—all that seemed to him like so

many minor details, so many tedious ceremonies, and there would be time enough to think about them on the day they took place. Nor did he spend time thinking about the actual moment of death: I'll think about it after the sentence is passed. Life was not tedious to him, though. Everything appeared in a new light to him now, and he had no more ambition. He rarely thought about Mademoiselle de La Mole. His remorse did occupy him a great deal, however, and it often brought the image of Madame de Rênal to mind, especially during the nights when the silence was almost absolute, broken only, in this high dungeon, by the singing of the osprey!

He thanked heaven that he had not given her a fatal wound. It's such a strange thing, he said to himself, that I thought the letter she sent to Monsieur de La Mole had destroyed all my future chances for happiness, but now, less than two weeks after the date on that letter, I don't even think at all about all the things that occupied me so back then . . . Two or three thousand francs a year, and a peaceful life up in mountain country, in a place like Vergy . . . I was happy then . . . And I didn't even know that I was happy!

At other moments, he would leap up suddenly from his chair. If I had given Madame de Rênal a mortal wound, I would have killed myself. I have to believe that, if I don't want to be a horror to myself!

Kill myself! That's the big question, he said to himself. These judges with all their formalities, so relentless in hunting down the poor accused—they'd have the finest citizen in town hanged, if it would earn them a cross to pin on their coats . . . I ought to remove myself from their power over me, from the insults they'll spew in bad French, which the newspapers will proceed to describe as eloquence . . .

I might live another five or six weeks, give or take . . . Kill myself! No, never: Napoleon lived . . .

Besides, I like life; my time here is peaceful. I have nothing annoying me, he added with a laugh, and he turned to write out a list of books he wanted to have sent from Paris.

## A DUNGEON

*The tomb of a friend.*STERNE<sup>203</sup>

He heard loud noises out in the corridor; it was not the normal hour when anyone came up to his prison cell. The noise made the osprey fly off shrieking. The door opened, and venerable old Father Chélan, trembling all over, leaning on a cane, came in and flung himself into his arms.

“Oh great God! Can this be possible, my child . . . Monster, I should say!”

The good old man was unable to speak another word. Julien feared he was going to collapse. He had to walk him over to a chair. The hand of time had weighed heavily on this man, once so filled with energy. Julien thought now that he looked like only the shadow of what he used to be.

When he managed to catch his breath: “Just yesterday I got your letter from Strasbourg with the five hundred francs for the poor in Verrières. They brought it to me up in the mountains in Liveru, where I’ve retired and live with my nephew Jean . . . Oh, heavens! Can this be possible!” The old man stopped weeping and sat there with a blank expression. He added mechanically, “You’ll need your five hundred francs. I’ll get them back to you.”

“I need to see you, Father!” Julien exclaimed with emotion. “I have all the money I need.”

But he couldn’t get any kind of coherent answer out of the old man. From time to time, Monsieur Chélan shed a few tears, which coursed silently down along his cheeks; then he looked at Julien and seemed stunned to see him take his hands and lift them to his lips. That face, once so animated, so energetic, so expressive of the noblest sentiments, could no longer seem to express anything but apathy. Soon, a sort of peasant arrived, looking for the old

man. "Shouldn't fatigue him," he said to Julien, who realized that this was the nephew. The visit, like an apparition from the past, left Julien plunged into a misery so cruel that he could not even weep. Everything seemed sorrowful, everything beyond consolation; he felt his heart turning to ice within his chest.

This was the cruelest moment he had undergone since the crime. He had just seen death, and in all its ugliness. All his illusions concerning the grandeur and generosity of the soul were scattered like clouds before a tempest.

The hideous state lasted several hours. After moral poisoning, one needs physical remedies, and champagne. Julien would have considered himself a coward if he had had recourse to them. Then, toward the end of that horrible day, spent entirely in pacing in his narrow cell: How mad I must be! he cried. If I could expect to die an ordinary death, then the sight of that poor old man should naturally throw me into a terrible state. But a swift death in the flower of my youth is precisely the way to avoid ever knowing that sad decrepitude.

But however he tried to reason his way out, Julien continued to feel grieved, like a cowardly creature, and the visit continued to torment him.

There was nothing rugged, nothing grandiose left in him, no Roman virtue; death seemed now to be something higher, and something less easy.

This will be my thermometer, he said to himself. Tonight, I'm ten degrees below the courage I need to face the guillotine. This morning, I did have the courage. Nothing else matters, as long as it comes back to me at the moment I need it. The metaphor of the thermometer amused him, and eventually succeeded in distracting him.

When he awoke the next day, he was ashamed at the memory of the day before. My happiness, my peace of mind are at stake. He resolved to write to the head prosecutor to ask that no one else be allowed to visit him. And Fouqué, he thought. If he takes it into his head to come to Besançon, imagine how unhappy he'll be!

It might have been a good two months since he'd even thought about Fouqué. I was a fool in Strasbourg; I couldn't think past my suit of clothes. Now the memory of Fouqué preoccupied him and made him even sadder. He paced

back and forth in agitation. Here I am twenty degrees below the level of death . . . If this weakness keeps growing, it'll be better to kill myself. But what a joy it would be for the Maslons and the Valenods if I were to die here like a lackey!

Fouqué arrived; the simple, decent man was overwhelmed with sorrow. His one idea—if he had any at all—was to sell off everything he owned to bribe the jailer and save Julien. He talked a long time about the escape of Monsieur de Lavalette.<sup>204</sup>

“But talk like this is just painful,” Julien said to him. “Monsieur de Lavalette was innocent, and I'm guilty. I know you don't mean to, but you're just making me focus on the difference . . .

“But—do you mean it? Really? You'd sell everything?” said Julien, suddenly turning alert and suspicious again.

Fouqué, delighted to see his friend responding to the most important idea, went into lengthy detail, and within a hundred francs or so, about how much he could get from the sale of his holdings.

What a sublime effort from a country landowner! thought Julien. How many little economies, little penny-pinching moments that made me blush when I saw him making them, and now he's willing to sacrifice it all for me! None of those fine gentlemen I saw at the Hôtel de La Mole, the type who read *René*,<sup>205</sup> would be caught dead scrimping like that. But apart from the ones who are still quite young and have inherited their fortunes, and haven't yet learned the value of money—apart from them, which of those splendid Parisians would be capable of a sacrifice like this?

All Fouqué's fractured French, all his vulgar habits disappeared now, and Julien threw his arms around him. Never have the provinces, when being compared to Paris, received a nobler homage. Fouqué, delighted with his friend's outburst of enthusiasm, mistook it for consent to his plan.

This glimpse of the *sublime* restored to Julien all the inner strength that the visit from Father Chélan had stolen from him. Yes, he was still very young, but in my opinion, he was a fine plant. Most men, as they age, devolve from tenderness to cunning, but aging would have allowed Julien to feel more, and more



readily, and it would have cured him of that insane distrust of his . . . But what's the good of these "if only" speculations?

The interrogations increased in frequency despite Julien's efforts; he kept trying to bring things to a conclusion at once. "I've murdered, or at least I wanted to kill, and I did it with premeditation," he repeated every day. But since the examining magistrate was one of those who insist on following set procedure at all costs, these declarations did nothing to shorten the interrogations; instead, they only wounded the examining magistrate's self-esteem. Julien did not know that they had planned to have him moved to an especially frightful cell, and that it was thanks to certain steps Fouqué took that he was allowed to remain in his pleasant room, a hundred and eighty steps up into the tower.

The abbé de Frilair was one of Fouqué's more important clients, contracting with him for his supply of firewood. The honest timber merchant had managed to get access to the all-powerful vicar-general. To his inexpressible delight, Monsieur de Frilair told him he had been moved by Julien's fine qualities and the service he had rendered while in the seminary, and he planned on testifying in his favor with the magistrates. Fouqué saw in this a ray of hope for saving his friend, and as he was leaving, he prostrated himself and begged the vicar-general to accept ten louis from him, for Masses to be said for the acquittal of the accused.

But Fouqué had strangely misinterpreted. Father de Frilair was nothing like a Valenod. He refused the money and tried to get the good peasant to see that it would be much better to hang on to his money. Seeing that he could not make himself clear without being imprudent, he counseled him to give the money away as alms for the poor prisoners who in fact were very much in need.

This Julien is quite an exceptional case; his actions are inexplicable, thought Monsieur de Frilair, and nothing should be inexplicable to me . . . Perhaps we could make a martyr out of him . . . In any case, I'm going to get to the truth about this whole affair, and I might even get a chance to put some fear into that Madame de Rênal, who not only doesn't respect me but deep down actually detests me . . . And maybe I'll be able to find, somewhere in all this, a means of

effecting a grand, public reconciliation with Monsieur de La Mole, who has a weakness for the little seminarian.

The lawsuit settlement had been signed a few weeks previous, and Father Pirard had left Besançon, not without having made references to the mystery of Julien's birth, on the very day the poor wretch had tried to kill Madame de Rênal in the church at Verrières.

Julien could envision only one disagreeable event between now and his death, and that was a visit from his father. He asked Fouqué what he thought of the idea of his writing to the prosecutor, asking to allow him no more visitors. Such abhorrence at the thought of seeing one's own father deeply shocked the decent bourgeois timber merchant.

He thought he could understand now why so many people hated his friend so passionately. Out of respect for his sufferings, he hid what he was feeling.

"Well, anyway," he replied coldly, "such a privacy order wouldn't apply to your father."

## 38

# A POWERFUL MAN

*But there is so much mystery in the things she does,  
and so much elegance in her style! Who can she be?*

SCHILLER

The doors of his cell were opened early the next morning, and Julien awoke with a start.

"Oh, good God," he thought. "Here comes my father. What a revolting scene!"

But at the same moment, a woman dressed in peasant clothes threw herself into his arms, clutching him convulsively.<sup>206</sup> It was Mademoiselle de La Mole.

“You wicked boy—I only learned where you were from your letter. What you call your ‘crime,’ and which is really only the noble vengeance that shows me again what a lofty heart beats in your chest, I found out only when I got to Verrières . . .”

Despite his biases against Mademoiselle de La Mole, which in any case he had never fully admitted to himself, Julien found her very pretty. How could he not see in her actions, in the things she said, noble, disinterested feelings, far above anything that a petty, ordinary heart could aspire to? Again, he felt he was in love with a queen, and after a few seconds, he said to her, with a rare nobility of speech and of thought:

“The future had come into view quite clearly for me. After my death, I would have you remarried to Monsieur de Croisenois, who would be marrying a widow. And that charming widow’s noble but a bit romantic spirit, now shocked and converted into the cult of common everyday prudence by a singular, tragic, and for her great event, would have deigned to see and appreciate the very real merits of the young Marquis. You would have resigned yourself to be happy with what makes the rest of the world happy: status, wealth, high rank . . . But now, my dear Mathilde, I fear that your coming here to Besançon, if anyone suspects it, will be the death of Monsieur de La Mole, and I could never forgive myself for that. I’ve already caused him so much suffering! The academician will say that he’s been fostering a serpent in his bosom.”

“I must admit I didn’t expect to get such a chilly, rational reaction, with so much prudent concern for the future,” said an annoyed Mademoiselle de La Mole. “My chambermaid, who’s just as prudent as you, took out a passport in her name, and I’ve used the name Madame Michelet as I hurried here by post chaise.”

“And Madame Michelet found it easy to get in to visit me?”

“Ah, you’re still the superior man I chose for my own! First, I offered one of the magistrate’s secretaries a hundred francs, when he claimed it was not possible for me to get into the prison. But once the money changed hands, that good and honest man made me wait, started raising objections, and I began to think he intended to rob me . . .” She stopped.

“And?” asked Julien.

“Don’t be angry with me, my dear little Julien,” she said, embracing him. “I had no choice but to tell him my name, because he took me for some young working girl from Paris, infatuated with the handsome Julien . . . Really—those were the terms he actually used. I swore to him that I was your wife, and I got permission to come see you every day.”

Well, the madness is complete now, thought Julien; I couldn’t prevent it. And after all, Monsieur de La Mole is a great lord, and public opinion will easily find a way to excuse the young colonel who’ll marry this charming widow. My death, which is coming soon, will cover it all up. And with that, he surrendered himself completely to the pleasures of Mathilde’s love. It was madness, it was a grandeur of the soul, it was everything strange, unique, singular. She proposed, quite seriously, that they commit suicide together.

After the first ecstasies had passed, and when she had finally had her fill of the joy of gazing upon Julien, a powerful curiosity began to arise within her. She examined her lover closely, finding him even greater than what she had imagined. It was as if Boniface de La Mole had been reincarnated in him, only even more heroic.

Mathilde went to see the best defense lawyers in the region; she offended them by offering them gold too crudely, but they all ended up accepting it.

It wasn’t long before she realized that when it came to dubious matters and things of great importance, everything in Besançon depended on the abbé de Frilair.

Using the name Madame Michelet, she encountered endless obstacles and difficulties in securing a meeting with the all-powerful Congrégationist. But gossip was spreading about a young milliner from Paris who had popped up in Besançon, out of her mind with love and anxious to console the young abbé Julien Sorel.

Mathilde went about alone and on foot through the Besançon streets, hoping no one would recognize her, but at the same time thinking it would help her cause if she made an impression on the locals. In her folly she fantasized about getting them all to rise up in revolt, in order to save Julien when he was

on his way to the scaffold. Mademoiselle de La Mole thought she was wearing the kind of simple attire that any grieving woman would wear, but in fact she drew attention to herself from all sides.

Everyone in Besançon was aware of her when, after a week of trying, she succeeded in getting a meeting with Monsieur de Frilair.

Brave as she was, the idea of a Congrégationist was associated so firmly in her mind with profound, self-promoting wickedness that she trembled when she rang the bell at the door to the bishop's palace. Her legs would barely hold her up as she ascended the stairs that led to the vicar general's suite of rooms. The solitude of the bishop's palace produced a cold fear in her. I could sit down in some armchair, and the chair's arms could stretch out and lock me in; after that, I'd be made to disappear. Who could my maid ask for news about me? The police captain wouldn't do a thing . . . I'm all alone in this town!

But the minute she had a look at the apartment, Mademoiselle de La Mole felt reassured. The first thing she saw was the servant who opened the door for her, dressed in extremely elegant livery. The drawing room where she was asked to wait exuded a fine, delicate luxury, with no hints of vulgar extravagance; it was the kind of tone one found in only the best homes of Paris. And when she saw Father de Frilair coming toward her with a paternal air about him, she dropped all her fantasies of hideous crimes. She was relieved not to see on his handsome face any signs of that energetic, almost savage virtue so antipathetic to Parisian high society. The little half smile animating the features of this priest who controlled everything in Besançon announced a refined man, an educated cleric, a skilled administrator. Mathilde felt as if she were back in Paris.

It took just a few moments for Monsieur de Frilair to lead Mathilde into confessing that she was in fact the daughter of his powerful adversary, the Marquis de La Mole.

"I am not, as a matter of fact, Madame Michelet," she said, taking on all the hauteur of her usual bearing, "and this admission costs me little, because I have come here to consult with you, Monsieur, regarding the possibility of arranging the escape of Monsieur de La Vernaye. In the first place, he's only guilty of a

foolish act; the woman he shot is recovering perfectly well. In the second place, to bribe the various menials, I am ready to put down, here and now, fifty thousand francs, and I promise to double that. Finally, my gratitude, and the gratitude of my family would find nothing impossible in the future for the person who arranges to save Monsieur de La Vernaye.”

Monsieur de Frilair seemed surprised at that name. Mathilde showed him several letters from the Ministry of War addressed to Monsieur Julien Sorel de La Vernaye.

“You see, Monsieur, that my father has taken on the responsibility for his future. I married him secretly. My father wanted to await his being made a high-ranking officer before publicly announcing the marriage, which is, to tell the truth, a little unusual for a La Mole.”

Mathilde observed that his expression of kindness and good humor faded rapidly away as Monsieur de Frilair made these successive important discoveries.

The priest had his doubts; he slowly went back over the official documents.

What good can I do myself with these strange admissions? he asked himself. Here I am plunged instantly into an intimate relation with a friend of the famous Maréchale de Fervaques, the all-powerful niece of Monseigneur the bishop of \*\*\*, and it is through him that one becomes a bishop in France.

What I thought was hidden far off in the future suddenly appears right in front of me. This can propel me to everything I’ve ever wanted.

Mathilde at first was frightened by the rapid transformation of that powerful man’s face, and by realizing she was alone in the room with him, and in a remote part of the palace. But what of it! she soon said to herself. Wouldn’t it have been worse, much worse, if I’d made no impression at all on this priest’s cold egoism, sated as he is with his pleasures and all his power?

Stunned by this sudden, unlooked-for door opening to the bishopric right before his eyes, surprised by the shrewdness of Mathilde, Monsieur de Frilair was off his guard for a moment. Mademoiselle de La Mole very nearly saw him down at her feet, trembling and nervous with ambition.

Now it all becomes clear, she said to herself; nothing will be impossible in

this place for a friend of Madame de Fervaques. Despite a lingering feeling of bitter jealousy, she had the courage to explain that Julien was the intimate friend of the maréchale and met Monseigneur the bishop of \*\*\* almost daily in her drawing room.

“When they draw a list of thirty-six jurors by lot, four or five times in a row, from among the worthy people in this département,” said the vicar-general, a cruel glint of ambition glowing in his eyes, “I would consider it highly unlikely if I do not find eight or nine friendly people in each group, and the brightest of the group too. So I would almost always have a majority, more than is needed, even if the verdict were guilty. You see, therefore, Mademoiselle, how extremely easy it will be to get him acquitted.”

The priest broke off abruptly, as if startled by the sound of his words; he was admitting things that one should never admit in front of the profane.

But then it was Mathilde’s turn to be struck with astonishment when he informed her that the thing that surprised and fascinated Besançon society in this strange adventure of Julien was the fact that he had inspired such a grand passion in Madame de Rênal, and that for a long time he felt the same about her. Monsieur de Frilair could easily see how very disturbing his tale was to her.

Now I have my revenge! he thought. Here at last is my method of controlling this headstrong young woman; I was afraid I wouldn’t be able to. Her distinguished, haughtily independent air intensified the charm of that young beauty he now saw turning almost suppliant before him. It returned all his composure to him, so much so that he didn’t hesitate to twist the knife a little.

“I wouldn’t be surprised after all,” he said lightly, “if we were to learn that it was jealousy that drove Monsieur Sorel to fire twice at the woman he had once loved so much. She is not without charms, and for some time now she had been seeing a certain Father Marquiot from Dijon, a sort of Jansenist lacking in morals—as they all are.”

Monsieur de Frilair went on taking a voluptuous pleasure in slowly, patiently torturing the pretty girl’s heart, now that he had discovered her weakness.

“Why,” he began, fixing his intense gaze on Mathilde, “why would Monsieur Sorel have chosen precisely that church and precisely that moment,

when his rival was celebrating Mass? Everyone agrees in attributing infinite intelligence, and equal caution, to this man who is so fortunate as to have earned your protection. Well, wouldn't it have been simpler for him to go crouch in Monsieur de Rênal's garden, a place he knew so well? There, almost certain that he would neither be seen nor suspected nor apprehended, he could easily have murdered the woman of whom he was so jealous."

This reasoning seemed so sound that Mathilde was severely shaken. That haughty spirit of hers, steeped as it was in the dry, rational prudence that society calls a faithful representation of the human heart, was not made to grasp the joy there is in throwing all prudence aside, a joy that is so intense for the more passionate spirit. Among the upper strata of Parisian society, where Mathilde lived, passion very rarely overcomes prudence, and when people throw themselves out the window, it's from the fifth floor.<sup>207</sup>

Now the priest was sure of his hold over her. He implied to Mathilde (probably a lie) that he could control the public ministry that would be bringing the charges against Julien.

After lots had been drawn and thirty-six jurors selected, he would make a direct, personal appeal to at least thirty of them.

If Mathilde had not seemed so attractive to Monsieur de Frilair, it would have taken five or six meetings before he would have spoken so openly and directly.

## 39

# INTRIGUE

*March 31, 1676—He that endeavoured to kill his sister in our house, had before killed a man, and it had cost his father five hundred écus to get him off; by their secret distribution, gaining the favour of the counsellors.*



Upon leaving the bishop's palace, Mathilde did not hesitate to send off a messenger to Madame de Fervaques; not even for a second did she worry about compromising herself. She entreated her rival to get a letter for Monsieur de Frilair, written entirely in the hand of Monseigneur the bishop of \*\*\*. She went so far as to beg her to come herself to Besançon. These were heroic acts on the part of such a jealous and proud spirit.

Following Fouqué's advice, she was careful to say nothing to Julien about all the measures she was taking. Her presence troubled him enough without adding that. A more honorable man, now that he was facing death, than he had been during his life, he felt regret and remorse not only concerning Monsieur de La Mole but Mathilde too.

How strange! he said to himself. When she's around, I find myself distracted, even bored. She's ruining herself for me, and this is how I pay her back! Am I really evil? The question had rarely occurred to him when he was in the grip of ambition; then, the only shame in his eyes was not to succeed.

His feelings of unease when Mathilde was near stood out all the more because right now he inspired in her the most extreme, the wildest kind of passion. She could hardly talk of anything but the strange sacrifices she wanted to make to save him.

Exalted by feelings of which she was proud, feelings that were even stronger than her pride, she would have liked for extraordinary, heroic acts to fill up every passing minute of her life. The strangest schemes, and most dangerous to her, dominated her long conversations with Julien. The jailers, all well bribed, let her reign in the prison. Mathilde's ideas were not bounded even by sacrificing her reputation; she didn't care if the whole world knew all about it. Throwing herself down on her knees in front of the king's galloping horses to beg for Julien's freedom, attracting the attention of the prince<sup>209</sup> even at the risk of being crushed to death a thousand times over—this was one of the mildest of the bizarre chimeras that populated that exalted, courageous imagination of hers. With the aid of her friends at court, she was sure of being admitted even into the reserved areas of the park at Saint-Cloud.<sup>210</sup>

Julien felt entirely unworthy of devotion like hers; and to tell the truth, he

was tired of heroism. The kind of woman to appeal to him now would be someone simple, naive, almost timid, whereas in Mathilde he was with the kind of woman who was always aware of a public and an audience.

While she was feeling so much anguish, so much fear for the life of her beloved whom she had no intention of surviving, she still felt a secret need to shock and surprise the public by the excess of her love and the sublimity of her schemes.

Julien was in no mood to be touched by all this heroism. What would he have thought if he'd been told of all the wild ideas Mathilde was pouring out to the devoted but eminently reasonable, and somewhat limited, Fouqué?

He didn't know whether he ought to be critical of Mathilde's devotion, for he, too, had been willing to sacrifice his whole fortune and expose himself to great dangers in order to save Julien. He was stunned by the sheer amount of gold Mathilde was throwing around. In the first days, those great sums impressed Fouqué, who, like the provincial he was, felt a deep veneration for money.

But soon he came to find that Mademoiselle de La Mole kept changing her various schemes, and he found considerable solace in discovering the perfect word to describe this character who exhausted him so: she was *changeable*. Now, from that to *difficult*, which is the very worst epithet in the provinces, was but a small step.

It's very odd, Julien said to himself one day when Mathilde was leaving the prison, that such a powerfully passionate love, and one centered entirely on me, should leave me so indifferent! And how profoundly I worshipped her, only a couple of months ago! I've often read that the approach of death makes us lose our interest in things, but it's horrible to feel like such an ingrate, and to be unable to change. Am I an egoist? He reproached himself over and over on this score, in the most humiliating terms possible.

Ambition was dead in his heart, and another passion had been born from its ashes: he called it remorse for the attempt on Madame de Rênal's life.

In point of fact, he was madly in love with her. He felt extremely happy when he was left entirely to himself and without any fear of being interrupted, for then he could give himself up altogether to the memory of the happy days

he had spent in the past at Verrières and at Vergy. The slightest incidents from that time that had flown by too swiftly retained for him a freshness, an irresistible charm. He never thought back on his days in Paris; they bored him.

Julien's changed attitudes and mood grew more and more noticeable, and they were partly intuited by the jealous Mathilde. Certainly, she could see very well that she had a new rival now in Julien's love of solitude. Once she uttered, trembling inside, the name of Madame de Rênal. She could see Julien start. Her passion from that moment on knew neither bounds nor measure.

If he dies, I die after him, she said to herself with all the good faith in the world. What would they say in the Paris drawing rooms if they saw a girl of my rank go this far for a lover condemned to death? To find emotions like this, you'd have to go all the way back to the age of heroes; these are the kinds of love that quickened heartbeats in the time of Charles IX and Henri III.

In her most rapturous moments, pressing Julien's head against her heart: Can it be? she asked herself in horror. Is this charming head fated to fall? Well then, she added, inflamed with a heroism that was not without its pleasure, my lips, now pressed against his lovely hair, will be ice cold less than twenty-four hours later.

And even the memories of those heroic transports, with their hideous sensuality, held her within an invincible grip. The idea of suicide, so all-absorbing in itself, until now so remote from that proud mind, at length began to penetrate it, soon reigning there with an absolute power. No, the blood of my ancestors flowing in me has not grown lukewarm, she said with pride.

"I have a favor to ask of you," her lover said to her one day. "Put your child out to nurse in Verrières, and Madame de Rênal can keep an eye on the nurse."

"What you're asking me is very hard . . .," said Mathilde, going pale.

"Ah—yes, it is, and I apologize, a thousand apologies!" exclaimed Julien, as if being jerked up out of his reverie, turning and taking her in his arms.

After drying her eyes, he returned to the idea, only this time with a little more tact. He gave the conversation a melancholic, philosophical turn. He spoke about the future that, for him was closing soon. "We have to admit, my love, that the passions are an accident in life, but an accident that only happens to superior souls . . . The death of my child will be seen as a good thing for the

pride of your family, which is what the subordinate types will think. The inheritance of this child of misfortune and shame will be neglect . . . I hope a time will come, I don't want to fix when exactly, when you'll have the courage to comply with my last wishes: you should marry the Marquis de Croisenois."

"What? Dishonored?"

"Dishonor can't get a real grip on a name like yours. You'll be a widow, and the widow of a madman, that's all. I'll go further: my crime, since it had nothing to do with trying to gain money, will not be seen as dishonoring you at all. Maybe by that time some legislator-philosopher will have succeeded in overcoming the prejudices of his contemporaries and will get capital punishment outlawed.<sup>211</sup> Then, some friendly voice might cite me as an example: 'You see, the first spouse of Mademoiselle de La Mole was a madman but not a wicked one or a criminal. It was absurd to behead him . . .' And at that point, I will cease to be an infamous memory, at least after a certain time has passed . . . Your stature in society, your fortune, and, permit me to say, your genius will help make Monsieur de Croisenois, your husband by then, play a role, act on a level he could never attain on his own. He only has high birth and bravery, and those qualities all by themselves could make for a man of accomplishment back in 1729, but they make him only an anachronism a century later, and only arouse pretensions. He'll need other qualities if he's to become a leader of French youth.

"You can bring the resources of a firm, enterprising spirit to whatever political party you put your spouse in. You'll be the successor of the Chevreuses and the Longuevilles from the days of the Fronde . . . But by then, my dear one, this heavenly fire that burns within you now will have died down a bit.

"Permit me to say," he added, after numerous preparatory phrases, "that in fifteen years you'll look back on this love you have for me and see it as a kind of madness—an excusable madness, but a madness just the same . . ."

He stopped abruptly and returned to his reverie. He found himself thinking again of the idea that would seem so shocking to Mathilde: "In fifteen years, Madame de Rênal will adore my son, and you'll have forgotten him."

## TRANQUILITY

*It is because I was mad then that I am wise now.  
O you philosopher, seeing nothing but the present, how limited  
is your view! Your eye was not made to follow the  
subterranean work that the passions do.*

GOETHE<sup>212</sup>

The conversation was interrupted by an interrogation, followed by a meeting with the lawyer for the defense. These were the only truly unpleasant moments in a life that had become an agreeable existence, free of care and devoted to daydreaming.

“It was murder, and murder with premeditation,” Julien said to the examining magistrate and his defense attorney. “Terribly sorry, Messieurs,” he added with a smile, “but this simple fact reduces your tasks to almost nothing.”

When he had managed to be rid of those two, Julien said to himself: The fact is that I need to be brave, and apparently braver than those two men. They regard this duel, with its fatal outcome, as the worst of all possible evils, as the *king of terrors*<sup>213</sup>—though I’m not going to think about it at all until the day itself.

And that’s because I’ve known worse, Julien continued, philosophizing with himself. I suffered worse during my first trip to Strasbourg, when I thought Mathilde had abandoned me . . . And imagine it: I so passionately desired the perfect intimacy with her that today leaves me so cold . . . The fact is, I’m happier by myself than when that so-beautiful girl shares my solitude.

The attorney, a man of rules and formal procedures, thought he was mad, and assumed, along with the rest of the public, that it was jealousy that drove him to pick up his pistols. One day he tried hinting to Julien that the allegation

of madness, whether true or false, would give their defense an excellent basis. But at that, the accused immediately became angry and aggressive.

“If you want to keep living, Monsieur,” cried Julien, completely beside himself, “never mention that abominable lie in my hearing again!” The prudent attorney thought he was about to be murdered himself.

He was preparing his speech for the defense, because the decisive moment was rapidly approaching. Besançon and the whole département were talking of nothing but this cause célèbre. Julien didn’t know anything about that, because he had insisted that no one talk to him about that sort of thing.

On that day, when Fouqué and Mathilde wanted to let him know about some rumors in the air that, they believed, gave cause for hope, Julien cut them off immediately.

“Let me have my ideal life. Your petty fussing, all the details from real life, all more or less painful for me to listen to—all this is just dragging me down from my heaven. We all die the way we have to, and I want to think about death in my own way. What do I care about *other people*? All my relationships with *other people* are about to come to an abrupt end. So please, don’t talk to me about those people; it’s bad enough that I have to deal with the magistrate and the lawyer.”

He said to himself, In fact, it looks as if my fate is to die dreaming. A nobody like me, guaranteed to be forgotten in a couple of weeks, would be a real fool if he decided to be theatrical . . .

But it’s odd that I’ve only mastered the art of enjoying life now that I’m so close to leaving it.

He spent these last days pacing up on the narrow little terrace on the roof of the prison, smoking some excellent cigars Mathilde had ordered for him from Holland and had delivered by a courier, entirely unaware that every telescope in town was trained on him, as everyone waited every day for him to show himself. In his thoughts, he was back in Vergy. He never spoke about Madame de Rênal to Fouqué, but his friend did mention, two or three different times, that her recovery was progressing rapidly, and the words echoed in his heart.

While Julien had taken up residence almost entirely in the realms of thought, Mathilde occupied herself with realities, as becomes the aristocratic heart. She had managed to advance the degree of intimacy between Madame de Fervaques and Monsieur de Frilair to such a point that, already, the great word *bishopric* had been pronounced.

The venerable prelate in charge of the list of benefices added, as a postscript to one of his niece's letters: *This poor Sorel is just a scatterbrain; I hope he'll be restored to us.*

When he read that, Monsieur de Frilair was thrilled with delight. He had no doubt that he could save Julien.

"If it weren't for the Jacobin law that says an interminable list of jurors must be drawn up,<sup>214</sup> and whose real purpose is to reduce the influence of well-born people," he said to Mathilde the day before the drawing was to be held for the list of thirty-six jurors, "I could guarantee the verdict. I was the one, after all, who secured the acquittal of Father N\*\*\*."

It was with pleasure, the next day, that Monsieur de Frilair saw the list of names drawn from the urn, and among them were five members of the Besançon Congrégation, and, among those who were from other towns, he saw the names of Messieurs Valenod, de Moirod, and de Cholin. "I can answer for these eight," he said to Mathilde. "The first five are *machines*. Valenod is my agent, de Moirod owes me everything he has, and de Cholin is an imbecile who is frightened of everything."

The newspaper published, throughout the département, the names of the jurors, and Madame de Rênal, to the inexpressible horror of her husband, wanted to go to Besançon. The most that Monsieur de Rênal could get out of her by way of concession was a promise to stay in her bed, so as not to have the unpleasant experience of having to testify. "You don't understand my situation," said the ex-mayor of Verrières. "I'm a Liberal by *defection* now, as they say,<sup>215</sup> and there's no doubt that the scoundrel Valenod and Monsieur de Frilair will easily persuade the prosecutor and the judges anything they can that'll be unfavorable to me."

Madame de Rênal assented without protest to her husband's orders. If I

were to appear in the courtroom, she said to herself, it would look as if I were seeking vengeance.

But despite all the promises she made both to her spiritual director and to her husband about being prudent, as soon as she arrived in Besançon she wrote, in her own hand, to every one of the thirty-six jurors:

*I will not appear on the day of the trial, Monsieur, because my presence might damage Monsieur Sorel's case. I ask only one thing, and I ask it with all my heart: let him be saved. You must have no doubt that the terrible idea that because of me an innocent man has been sent to his death—the thought would poison the rest of my life, and indeed would probably shorten it. How can you possibly condemn him to death when I'm still living? No, clearly, society does not have the right to take a life, and especially that of a man like Julien Sorel. Everyone in Verrières knew about and had observed his moments of derangement. The poor young man has powerful enemies, but among his enemies (and how many there are!), would there be any who would deny his remarkable talents and his profound learning? This is not some ordinary citizen you're about to judge, Monsieur. For nearly eighteen months we all knew him to be pious, wise, hardworking; but two or three times a year he would fall into a state of melancholy so severe as to be almost a kind of madness. The whole town of Verrières, all our neighbors at Vergy where we spent the summer, my whole family, even the subprefect will all bear witness to his exemplary piety: he knows the entire Holy Bible by heart. Would an unbeliever expend the years of hard work it took to learn the holy book? My sons will have the honor of presenting this letter to you. Please ask them, Monsieur, and they will provide you with all the details concerning this poor young man that might still be necessary for you to convince yourself what a barbarism it would be to condemn him. Far from avenging me—you would be killing me.*

*What will his enemies possibly say to rebut this fact: the wound that resulted from one of those moments of derangement that my children themselves had observed in their tutor, is so minor that in less than two months, it has allowed me to travel post from Verrières to Besançon. If I hear that you*



*have even the slightest hesitation, Monsieur, about saving a young man so little guilty from a barbaric law, I will get up out of my bed, where I remain on my husband's orders, and I will come to you and throw myself at your feet.*

*Affirm, Monsieur, that the premeditation is not established, and you will not have to reproach yourself for spilling the blood of an innocent man, etc., etc.*

## 41

# THE TRIAL

*The nation will be discussing this famous case for a long time to come.*

*People's interest in the accused rose almost to the level of public disturbance; for his crime was shocking, but not frightful. And even if it were, the young man was so good-looking! The sudden end to his high destiny augmented the pity. "Will they condemn him?" the women asked the men they knew, and they went pale as they awaited the reply.*

SAINTE-BEUVE

At last it came, the day so dreaded by both Madame de Rênal and Mathilde.

The strange way the town looked only worsened their fears, and it even made an impression on the otherwise stout heart of Fouqué. The whole province had poured into Besançon to see the trial of this romantic case.

For the past several days, there were no more rooms to be had at the inns. The presiding judge was assailed by requests for tickets; every woman in town wanted to be there; Julien's portrait was being hawked along the streets, etc., etc.

Mathilde was holding in reserve for this supreme moment a letter written entirely in the hand of Monseigneur the bishop of \*\*\*. This prelate, who controlled the Church in France and who appointed bishops, had deigned to ask for the acquittal of Julien. The day before the trial, Mathilde took the letter to the all-powerful vicar-general.

When their meeting was ending, and as she broke into tears while taking her leave, he said, "I can answer for the jury's verdict." As he said this, he briefly dropped his diplomatic reserve and even seemed touched himself. "Out of the twelve people chosen to decide whether your protégé's crime is established and, above all, whether it was premeditated, I count six friends devoted to my future, and I've made it clear to them that my bishopric depends on this. Baron Valenod, whom I've made mayor of Verrières, completely controls both de Moirot and de Cholin, his subordinates. Now, to tell the truth, chance has stuck us with two highly disaffected jurors. But even though both are ultra-Liberals, they're faithful to my commands when it comes to important matters, and I've seen to it that they've been asked to vote with Monsieur Valenod. I understand that a sixth juror, a manufacturer, immensely rich and a babbling Liberal, is secretly angling for a contract with the Ministry of War, and he no doubt will want to avoid displeasing me. I've had him informed that Valenod knows my wishes."

"And who is this Monsieur Valenod?" asked Mathilde with some disquiet.

"Oh, if you knew him, you'd have no fears about our success. He's a loud-mouth, audacious, impudent, crude, the kind just perfect for being a leader of fools. The year 1814 pulled him up out of poverty, and I'm going to be making him a prefect. He's perfectly capable of physically attacking the other jurors if they don't vote his way."

Mathilde was somewhat reassured.

Another conversation awaited her that evening. So as not to prolong so unpleasant a scene, and one whose outcome, he believed, was certain, Julien had resolved that he would not speak one word at the trial.

"My lawyer will talk, and that will be plenty," he said to Mathilde. "And as it is, I'll already be displayed as a spectacle for my enemies long enough. These provincials are all shocked at the rapid rise in the world that I owe to you, and believe me, there won't be a single one of them who won't be hoping for my condemnation, and then they'll turn around and blubber like babies when they take me off to die."

"They want to see you humbled, that's only too true," replied Mathilde, "but

I don't believe they're cruel. My presence here in Besançon and the sight of my grief have intrigued all the women, and your good looks have done the rest. If you speak at all, even a little, in front of the judges, you'll have the whole courtroom on your side," etc., etc.

The next morning at nine, when Julien was taken down from his prison cell to go to the great hall of the law courts, the gendarmes had a great deal of difficulty clearing a path for him through the tremendous crowd that thronged the courtyard. Julien had slept well and he was now perfectly calm, feeling nothing but a sort of philosophical pity for this throng of the envious who, though without any cruelty at all, were nonetheless going to applaud when he received his death sentence. Thus he was very surprised when, having been stuck for a quarter of an hour in the midst of the crowd, he couldn't help but recognize that his presence was inspiring a tender pity among them. He didn't hear a single unpleasant remark. These provincials are less mean-spirited than I thought, he said to himself.

Upon entering the main courtroom, he was struck by the elegance of the architecture. It was all true Gothic, and a great many little columns, quite handsome, had been carved from the stone with the greatest care. He felt as if he were in England.

But his attention was soon taken up by a group of about a dozen or fifteen pretty women who occupied the three galleries above the judges and jury, directly opposite the prisoner's dock. Turning to look out toward the general public, he saw that the circular gallery overlooking the amphitheater was packed with women: most of them were young, and they all seemed strikingly attractive to him; their eyes shone with deep concern. A huge crowd filled up the rest of the great room; there was pushing and shoving in the doorways, and the guards were unable to preserve silence.

When all those eyes that had been looking out for Julien now saw that he had arrived, and that he was seated in the slightly elevated box reserved for the accused, he was greeted by a murmur of surprise and tender concern.

You would have said, seeing him that day, that he couldn't be twenty years old; he was dressed very simply, but with perfect grace, and the way his hair

encircled his brow was charming. Mathilde had insisted on getting him dressed and coiffed properly herself. Julien was pale to an extreme. As soon as he took his seat in the prisoner's dock, he could hear all around him: My God, how young he is! . . . But he's just a boy . . . He's much better looking than his portrait.

"Say, my prisoner," said the gendarme seated on his right, "can you see those six ladies up on the balcony?" He pointed up to a small gallery that projected out over the part of the amphitheater where the jury sat. "That's Madame, the wife of the prefect," the gendarme continued, "right next to Madame the Marquise of N\*\*\*; she thinks quite a lot of you. I heard her talking to the examining magistrate. And next to her is Madame Derville . . ."

"Madame Derville!" exclaimed Julien, his brow blushing a deep red. When she leaves here, he thought, she'll go and write to Madame de Rênal. He didn't know that Madame de Rênal was already in Besançon.

The witnesses soon gave their testimony. This took several hours.<sup>216</sup> As soon as the prosecution began reading out the charges, two of the women in the small balcony facing Julien burst into tears. Madame Derville would never feel that kind of emotion, thought Julien. But he did see that she looked quite flushed.

The public prosecutor, in his bad French, launched into an attack that emphasized the pathos of the barbaric crime; Julien noticed that the women next to Madame Derville were showing strong signs of disapproval. A number of jurors, evidently acquaintances of the women, were speaking to them and seemed to be reassuring them. That must be a good sign, thought Julien.

Until then, he felt nothing but an unmixed contempt for all the men participating in the trial. The inept rhetoric of the prosecutor raised that contempt to the level of disgust. But little by little, Julien's personal coldness began to thaw as he witnessed all the concern the onlookers clearly were feeling for him.

He was pleased with his defense attorney's firm expression. No flowery phrases, he said to him quietly as he stood to address the court.

"All that pomposity he stole from Bossuet and tried to attack you with, is only going to end up helping you," said his lawyer. The man had barely spoken

for five minutes before practically all the women had their handkerchiefs out and in their hands. Heartened by this, the lawyer addressed the jury in extremely strong terms. Julien trembled and felt that he was on the verge of tears. Good God! What would my enemies say?

He was about to surrender to the emotion that was arising in him when, fortunately for him, he happened to catch an insolent expression on the face of Baron Valenod.

That wretched boor has a glint in his eye, he said to himself. What a triumph for a base soul like his! If my crime had had no other consequence than the sight of that face, I would have been bound to curse it. God only knows what he'll say about me to Madame de Rênal!

That idea drove out all others. Shortly after that, Julien was abruptly brought back to reality by sounds of approval from the public. His lawyer had just finished his speech. Julien remembered that he was expected to shake his hand at this point. Time had flown by rapidly.

Refreshments were brought in for the lawyer and the accused. Only then was Julien struck by an interesting detail: no woman had left the courtroom to get dinner.

"My heavens, I'm dying of hunger," said the lawyer. "How about you?"

"Me too," said Julien.

"Look, there's the prefect's wife having some dinner brought to her," said the lawyer, nodding toward the little balcony. "Buck up; everything's going well." The trial was resumed.

As the presiding judge read out the summary, midnight struck. He had to interrupt his reading, as amid the silence and the universal anxiety, the tolling of the bell echoed throughout the courtroom.

And so begins the last of my days, thought Julien. Soon he began feeling an impulse of duty enflaming him. Until now, he had kept his feeling in check and had stuck to his determination not to speak; but when the presiding judge asked him if he had anything to add, he stood up. He could see the eyes of Madame Derville, which, in the lights, seemed to be shining. Could she possibly be weeping? he wondered.

“Gentlemen of the jury,

“My horror of having to endure scorn, which I thought I could endure at the moment of my death, now impels me to speak up. Gentlemen, I do not have the honor of belonging to your class. You see in me just a peasant who has rebelled against the lowliness of his station.

“I ask for no mercy from you,” Julien continued, his voice becoming firmer. “And I have no illusions: death awaits me, and death will be just. I was capable of attempting to end the life of the woman most worthy of my respect, of everyone’s respect. Madame de Rênal had been like a mother to me. My crime is outrageous, and it was *premeditated*. Therefore, I’ve earned the death sentence, gentlemen of the jury. But even if I were less guilty, I see before me certain men who, without pausing to wonder whether youth might deserve some pity, are anxious to punish me in order to discourage permanently those young men who were born into a lower class and who have lived lives oppressed by poverty to one degree or another, but who have the good fortune of having gotten a good education, and might be audacious enough to mix directly with what the pride of the wealthy calls society.

“And that is my crime, gentlemen, and it’s going to be punished all the more harshly simply because I am not being tried by my peers. I look at the jury and see no peasant grown rich, only indignant members of the bourgeoisie . . .”

For twenty minutes Julien talked in that style, saying everything that was in his heart; the prosecutor, who aspired to gaining the favor of the aristocracy, kept springing up from his seat. But despite the rather abstract turn that Julien’s argument had taken, all the women were in tears. Even Madame Derville had her handkerchief up to her eyes. As he came to his conclusion, Julien returned to the subject of premeditation and to his remorse, to his respect, to the unbounded filial affection that, during the happiest days of his life, he had felt for Madame de Rênal . . . Madame Derville uttered a cry and fainted.

One o’clock sounded as the jury retired to their chamber. Not one single woman had left her seat; many men had tears in their eyes. At first everyone was talking with animation, but as the jury’s return was delayed and everyone had to wait, a general fatigue set in, and the crowd grew calmer. The moment

felt solemn; the lamps were burning more dimly. A very tired Julien overheard people near him discussing whether the delay was a good or a bad sign. He saw with pleasure that everyone was on his side; the jury still did not return, and still not a woman got up and left her seat.

When two o'clock sounded, a great commotion could be heard. The little door leading to the jury chamber opened. Monsieur le Baron Valenod came out with a grave, theatrical step; the rest of the jury came after him. He cleared his throat, then declared that upon his soul and conscience, the jury unanimously agreed that Julien Sorel was guilty of murder, and of premeditated murder: this declaration entailed the death sentence,<sup>217</sup> and the sentence was pronounced a moment later. Julien glanced at his watch and thought of Monsieur de Lavalette:<sup>218</sup> it was two fifteen. Today is Friday, he thought.

Yes, but it's a glorious day for that Valenod, who's condemned me . . . They're keeping too close a watch on me for Mathilde to rescue me the way Madame de Lavalette did . . . Well! in three days, I'll have the answer, and know all about *the great perhaps*.

Just then he heard a cry and was recalled to the things of this world. The women around him were sobbing, and he saw that everyone was looking up at a little balcony carved into the top of a Gothic pilaster. He learned later that Mathilde had been there. As the cry was not repeated, all eyes turned now to Julien, as the gendarmes were trying to make a path for him through the crowd.

Let's try not to give that crook Valenod anything to sneer at, thought Julien. Oh, how contrite he sounded, the hypocrite, making his declaration, which amounts to the death sentence! And meanwhile that poor presiding judge, even though he's been a judge for so many years, he had a tear in his eye when he pronounced sentence on me. What a joy for Valenod, avenging himself for our old rivalry over Madame de Rênal . . . I'll never see her again! It's all over. . . Even a last goodbye won't be possible, I'm sure of it . . . How glad I would have been to confess to her all the horror I feel about my crime!

But just these words: I believe my sentence is just.

When Julien was brought back to the prison, he was taken to a cell reserved for those who had been sentenced to death.<sup>219</sup> He, a person who normally observed even the slightest details around him, now failed even to notice that he was not going back up to his previous cell. He was thinking of what he would say to Madame de Rênal if he were fortunate enough to be able to see her before his last moment. He thought she would interrupt him, so he was thinking of how to frame his words to express his repentance at once. After an act like that, how can I persuade her that she's the only one I love? Because after all, I tried to kill her partly out of ambition, partly out of love for Mathilde.

As he lay down on his bed, he found that the bedclothes were of a harsh and rough material. Ah yes, I'm in a cell, he said to himself, like a condemned man. That's the way it should be.

Comte Altamira told me that on the night before he died, Danton spoke out in a loud voice: "It's a strange thing, but the verb *to guillotine* can't be conjugated in every tense. You can say, I'll be guillotined, you'll be guillotined, but nobody says I have been guillotined."

But why not, thought Julien, if there is another life? . . . Well, if there is and I find the God of the Christians there, I'm a goner. He's a despot, and as such, all he thinks about is vengeance: his Bible is full of hideous punishments. I've never loved him; I never even believed that anyone else really loved him. He's pitiless (and here he recalled a number of phrases from the Bible). He'll punish me in some abominable way . . .

But what if I found the God of Fénelon! He might say to me, "Much will be pardoned for you, for you have loved much . . ." <sup>220</sup>

Have I loved much? Ah! I loved Madame de Rênal, but my conduct was horrific. There—and elsewhere too—I tossed aside simple, modest worth in favor of something with a more brilliant glow to it . . .

But, again, what a glow it was! . . . Colonel in the Hussars, if we had gone to war; secretary of a legation in times of peace; later, an ambassador . . . be-



cause I'd have learned how things work by then . . . and even if I were an utter fool, would the son-in-law of the Marquis de La Mole have to worry about any competition? All my foolishness would be pardoned, or maybe even counted as an advantage. A man of merit, enjoying the best possible life in Vienna, or in London . . .

Not exactly, Monsieur: guillotined three days from now.

Julien laughed heartily at this witty little sally that leapt forth from his own mind. Is it true, that a man has two selves within him? he wondered. What devil came up with that nasty little reflection?

Well, all right then, my friend, guillotined three days from now it is, he replied to his interlocutor. Monsieur de Cholin will rent a window to watch and split the cost with Father Maslon. But which of those two worthies will end up cheating the other over the price of the window?

An exchange from Rotrou's *Venceslas* came back to him now:<sup>221</sup>

LADISLAS: My soul is fully prepared.

THE KING, LADISLAS'S FATHER: So is the scaffold; take your head there.

A fine reply! he thought and drifted off to sleep. Someone awakened him in the morning by embracing him tightly.

"What? What is it?" asked Julien, opening a haggard eye. He thought he was being handled by the executioner.

It was Mathilde. Fortunately, she didn't understand me. That realization allowed him to regain his composure. He found Mathilde looking very different, as if she'd just come out of a six-month illness; really, she was unrecognizable.

"That wretch Filair betrayed me," she said, wringing her hands. She was too enraged to weep.

"Wasn't I fine yesterday when I stood up and spoke?" Julien replied. "I was improvising, and for the first time in my life! Well, granted, I'm afraid it'll turn out to be the last time too."

At this moment, Julien was playing upon Mathilde's character with all the calmness of a skilled pianist, touching the keys of his instrument . . . "It's true that I lack the advantage of high birth," he continued, "but the great soul of

Mathilde has raised her lover up to her level. Do you think Boniface de La Mole managed any better in front of his judges?”

Mathilde that day was tender with no trace of affectation, like some impoverished girl living on a fifth floor somewhere; but she could not get him to speak simply with her. He was repaying her, without meaning to, for all the torments she had so often inflicted on him.

Nobody knows the source of the Nile, Julien said to himself; it has not been given to the eye of man to gaze upon the king of all rivers as a simple little stream. And likewise, no human eye will ever gaze upon Julien as a weakling, and primarily because he is *not* weak. But it's easy to touch my heart. Even the most common word, if spoken with the accent of truth, can soften my own voice and make my tears start to flow. How many hardened hearts have scorned me for that failing! They think I was asking for mercy, and that is something I cannot endure.

They say the memory of his wife moved Danton as he stood at the base of his scaffold; but Danton had already imparted strength and power to a nation of nobodies, and he'd managed to prevent the enemy from reaching Paris . . . I'm the only one who knows what I might have been able to do . . . For everybody else, I was at best only a *maybe*.

If Madame de Rênal were here in my cell instead of Mathilde, would I be able to keep myself under control? The extremity of my despair and my remorse, to the Valenods and all the neighborhood patricians, would look like only an ignoble fear of death; they're all so proud, those weak hearts who are above temptation only because they have money! “See,” de Moirod and de Cholin would say, “see what it is to be born son of a carpenter! You might grow up to be learned and even skillful, but as for courage . . . ! Courage is something that can't be taught!” And even with this poor Mathilde, who's weeping now, or maybe she can't cry anymore, he added, looking at her reddened eyes . . . and he took her in his arms: the sight of real sorrow made him forget the syllogism he was developing. Maybe she's been crying the whole night long, he said to himself, but the day will come when the memory of this will fill her with such shame. She'll look back on herself and think she must have been utterly

lost, led astray in the flower of her youth by the cheap ideas of a plebeian . . .  
That de Croisenois is weak enough to marry her, and by God it'll be a good  
thing too. She'll make him play a role,

*By that right the great spirit in his vast designs  
Exerts over the weaker hearts of humankind.*<sup>222</sup>

Well now, this is amusing: now that I'm about to die, all the poetry I've ever  
read comes back to me. This must be a sign of my decadence . . .

Mathilde was repeating to him in a lifeless voice, "He's there, in the next  
room." He thought, Her voice is weak, but it still has all of that imperious ac-  
cent. She's speaking quietly, trying not to be angry.

He said, gently, "And who is it who's there?"

"The lawyer, to get your signature for your appeal."<sup>223</sup>

"I won't appeal."

"What! You won't appeal?" she exclaimed, leaping up, eyes ablaze with  
anger. "And why, exactly, if you don't mind?"

"Because right now I feel the courage to die without exciting too much  
mockery and laughter at my expense. And who can tell if after two months in  
this damp cell I'd still have that same courage? I can imagine conversations  
with priests, with my father . . . Nothing in the world could be quite that awful.  
So why not just die?"

This unexpected provocation reawakened all the haughty pride in Ma-  
thilde's character. She had not been able to see Father de Frilair before the cells  
in the Besançon prison were opened to visitors, so all her anger thundered  
down upon Julien. She adored him, and for the next quarter of an hour he  
heard again, in all the imprecations against his character, in her regret at ever  
having loved him, that arrogant spirit that had once so heaped him with sting-  
ing insults, back in the library at the Hôtel de La Mole.

"Heaven owed it to the glory of your race for you to have been born a man,"  
he said to her.

But as for me, he thought, I'd be a real fool to live on another two months  
in this foul place, serving as a target for all the vile, humiliating insults the pa-

trician tribe can invent,<sup>224</sup> and on top of that, having this cursing madwoman for my consolation . . . But instead, the day after tomorrow I'll be having a debate with a man famous for his utter composure and his remarkable skill . . . "—Very remarkable indeed," says Mephistopheles. "He lands every blow."

Fine then, there we are, that's the spirit (meanwhile, Mathilde's eloquence flowed on). No, by God, he swore to himself, I will not appeal.

Having taken this resolution, he let himself drift into reverie . . . The postman will come by and deliver the newspaper at 6, as usual. At 8, after Monsieur de Rênal has read it, Éliisa will tiptoe in and drop it on her bed. She'll wake up a little later; she'll read, and all of a sudden be overcome; that pretty hand of hers will tremble. She'll read up to the words that say . . . "At five minutes after ten o'clock, he ceased to exist."

She'll weep, and her tears will be hot, I know them. My attempt to kill her won't matter anymore, it'll all be forgotten. And the person whose life I sought to take will be the only one to weep sincerely for my death.

Oh, what an antithesis that is! he thought, and for another quarter of an hour, as Mathilde continued making her scene, he thought of nothing but Madame de Rênal. Despite himself, and despite having to respond several times to things Mathilde was saying, he could not tear his mind away from the memory of the bedroom in Verrières. He could see the Besançon newspaper against the orange taffeta quilt. He could see that white, that so-white hand clutching it convulsively. He watched Madame de Rênal weeping . . . He traced the downward route of each tear on that lovely face.

Mademoiselle de La Mole could get nothing out of Julien, so she had the lawyer come in. He was, fortunately, an old captain from the Italian campaign of 1796, where he had served with Manuel.<sup>225</sup>

For the sake of form, he vigorously opposed the condemned man's decision. Julien, desirous of treating him with respect, detailed his reasons.

"Honestly, you can persuade a man to think the same way you do," said Monsieur Félix Vaneau (which was the lawyer's name).<sup>226</sup> "But you have three days to appeal, and it's my duty to come back every day. If a volcano were to

burst open the prison during the next two months, you'd be saved. You could die of an illness," he added, looking at Julien.

Julien shook his hand. "I thank you; you're a good man. I'll think about it."

And as Mathilde saw the lawyer out, he realized he felt much more warmly about him than he did about her.

## 43

An hour later, as he was sleeping soundly, he was awakened by warm tears dropping on his hand. Ah, it's Mathilde again! he thought, half awake. She's back, dutifully following her plan, to wear down my determination with tender feelings. Bored immediately with this new act in her sentimental play, he didn't even open his eyes. The lines from *Belphégor* fleeing his wife came back to him.<sup>227</sup>

But then he heard an unusual sigh; he opened his eyes—it was Madame de Rênal.

"Ah—so I see you again before I die—or is this an illusion?" he cried, throwing himself at her feet.

"But forgive me, Madame, I'm nothing but a murderer in your eyes," he said, suddenly, standing up and coming to his senses.

"Monsieur . . . I've come to beg you to appeal. I know you don't want to . . ." Her sobs choked her; she couldn't go on speaking.

"Please forgive me."

"If you want my forgiveness," she said, throwing herself into his arms, "initiate the appeal right away."<sup>228</sup>

Julien covered her with kisses.

"Will you come and see me every day during the two months?"

"I swear I will. Every day—unless my husband forbids me."

"All right—I'll sign!" cried Julien. "Oh, you forgive me! Is it really possible!"

He held her tightly, mad with joy. She uttered a little cry. "It's nothing," she said. "You hurt me just a little."

"Your shoulder!" Julien exclaimed and burst into tears. He took a step back, pressing burning kisses onto her hand. "Who would ever have thought, the last time I saw you, in your bedroom in Verrières . . ."

"Who would have thought that I'd write that foul letter to Monsieur de La Mole?"

"You must know that I've always loved you, that I've never loved anyone but you."

"Can it really be!" exclaimed Madame de Rênal, thrilled in her turn. She leaned down over Julien, who was on his knees, and the two of them wept at length in silence.

Never in his life had Julien experienced a moment like this.

A long while later, when they were both able to speak:

"And this young Madame Michelet," said Madame de Rênal, "or rather Mademoiselle de La Mole—because I'm finally beginning to believe in this whole strange tale now!"

"It's true, but only in appearance," replied Julien. "She's my wife, but she isn't my mistress . . ."

They interrupted each other a hundred times, and slowly began to piece together all that they didn't know. The letter sent to Monsieur de La Mole had been written by the young priest, Madame de Rênal's spiritual director, and then copied out in her handwriting. "What a horrid thing religion made me do!" she said. "But I did soften the most hurtful things in that letter . . ."

Julien's transports of joy proved to her how fully he forgave her. He had never been so madly in love.

"I do consider myself a devout Christian, though," she said as they continued talking. "I sincerely believe in God. I also believe, and it's even been proved to me, that my sin is terrible, but as soon as I see you, even though you shot at me twice . . ." Here, despite her efforts, Julien again covered her in kisses.

"Stop, will you?" she said. "I want to talk seriously with you, for fear of for-

getting . . . The minute I see you, all my duties evaporate: I become nothing but love for you, or rather, the word ‘love’ is too feeble. I feel for you what I ought to feel only for God: a combination of respect, love, obedience . . . Really, I can’t say what it is you inspire in me. You could tell me to go over and plunge a knife into the jailer, and the crime would be committed before I had the time to think about it. Can you explain that for me before I leave you—because I want to see clearly into my heart—because in two months we’ll have to part . . . But speaking of that, do we really have to part?” she asked with a smile.

Julien leapt up, exclaiming, “I take it back. I won’t appeal the death sentence, if by poison or knife or pistol or charcoal<sup>229</sup> or any other means whatsoever you attempt to put an end to your life.”

Madame de Rênal’s expression changed; her look of warm affection altered as she seemed to slip into a profound reverie.

“But if we were to die right away?” she said at last.

“Who knows what we’ll find in the other life?” Julien replied. “Maybe torments, maybe nothing at all. Couldn’t we instead spend two months of delight together? Two months—that’s a lot of days. I’d never have been so happy.”

“You’d never have been so happy!”

“Never,” said a rapt Julien, “and I’m speaking to you exactly the way I speak to myself. May God preserve me from exaggeration.”

“Saying that to me is the same as giving me a command,” she said with a timid, melancholic smile.

“Well then! You swear, on the love you feel for me, not to make any attempt on your life, whether direct or indirect . . . and remember,” he added, “that you have to live for the sake of my son, who Mathilde will simply hand over to servants once she becomes the Marquise de Croisenois.”

“I do swear,” she said coldly, “but I want to take your appeal with me today, written and signed in your own hand. I’ll take it myself to the prosecutor.”

“Be careful, though: you’ll compromise yourself.”

“After deciding to come see you, publicly, in prison, I’ll forever be the main character of all sorts of tales and anecdotes in Besançon and all over the

Franche-Comté,” she said with a sorrowful expression. “The bounds of propriety have been overstepped.<sup>230</sup> I am a woman who no longer has her honor; it’s true that I did it for your sake . . .”

Her voice was so sad that Julien embraced her, feeling a happiness he’d never known before. It was no longer the intoxication of love; now it was extreme, intense gratitude. He had come to see, for the first time, the whole extent of the sacrifice she had made for him.

Someone with, no doubt, charitable motives told Monsieur de Rênal about the long visits his wife was making to Julien’s prison, for after three days he sent his carriage, with an express order that she return at once to Verrières.

That cruel parting was an ill beginning to Julien’s day. A few hours later, he was informed that a certain priest—a schemer who had nevertheless failed to gain any traction with the Besançon Jesuits—had that morning established himself right outside the prison door, in the street. It was raining hard, and the man was putting on some kind of martyr act. Julien was in a foul mood, and this imbecility annoyed him a great deal.

That morning he had already rejected the priest’s offer of a visit, but now this man had taken it into his head that if Julien would confess to him, he could make a name for himself among the young women of Besançon with all the secrets he could pretend he had been told.

He declared in a loud voice that he would spend all day and all night at the prison’s gate. “God has sent me to touch the heart of this apostate . . .”<sup>231</sup> And the lower sorts of people, always fascinated by any kind of scene, had begun gathering around him.

“Yes, my brothers,” he said to them, “I’ll spend the day here, and the night, and all the days and all the nights to come. The Holy Spirit has spoken to me. I have a mission from on high; I’m the one called to save the soul of young Sorel. Join me in prayer,” etc., etc.

Julien had a horror of scandal and of anything that might draw attention to himself. He fantasized briefly about slipping out of the world then and there unknown, but he retained some hope of seeing Madame de Rênal again, and he was desperately in love with her.



The prison's main gate was on one of the town's busiest streets. The idea of this mud-spattered priest attracting a big crowd and creating a scandal was like torture to him. "And he's probably speaking my name out there all the time!" The moment felt worse than death to him.

He called the guard two or three different times, at about an hour's interval, and asked the man, who was devoted to him, to go see if the priest was still outside the prison gate.

"Monsieur, he's out there kneeling down in the mud," the guard told him. "He's praying out loud, saying litanies for your soul . . ." How dare he! thought Julien. And just then he was able to hear a low murmuring sound, which was the crowd of people saying their responses to the litany. As if that weren't bad enough, he noticed that the guard himself was quietly moving his lips, repeating the Latin phrases. "People are starting to say," the guard continued, "that your heart must be awfully hardened for you to refuse the help of this holy man."

"Oh, my country—still so barbarous!" cried Julien, mad with rage. And he continued to think out loud, ignoring the guard's presence.

"The man wants to make it into the newspaper, and this is one sure way to get there.

"Oh, these accursed provincials! I wouldn't be subjected to all these vexations if I were in Paris. They can recognize the charlatan a lot more quickly there."

Finally, he said to the guard, "Have this holy priest come in," sweat coursing down his forehead. The guard made the sign of the cross and departed with joy in his heart.

The holy priest turned out to be hideously ugly, and even muddier than expected. The cold rain falling outside intensified the darkness and the dampness of the cell. The priest wanted to embrace Julien and tried to touch his heart as he spoke to him. The lowest, meanest hypocrisy was only too evident; Julien had never felt such rage.

A quarter of an hour later, Julien found himself turning cowardly. For the first time, death now appeared horrible to him. He thought about the state of

putrefaction his corpse would be in within a couple of days after the execution, etc., etc.

He very nearly betrayed himself by showing his weakness in some way, or by leaping upon the priest and strangling him with his chain, when he finally came up with the idea of giving the holy man forty francs and asking him to have a Mass said for him that very day.

Now, since it was almost noon, the priest hurried off.<sup>232</sup>

## 44

As soon as the priest was gone, Julien wept, and he wept at the thought of having to die. He slowly admitted to himself that if Madame de Rênal had been in Besançon, he would have confessed his weakness to her.

And at the very moment when he most regretted the absence of that adored woman, he heard the footsteps of Mathilde approaching.

The worst of all the miseries of prison, he thought, is being unable to shut your own door. Everything Mathilde said to him only irritated him.

She told him how Valenod, on the day of the trial, had his paper appointing him prefect already in his pocket, so he decided to defy Monsieur de Frilair and give himself the pleasure of seeing Julien condemned to death.

“‘What on earth was your friend thinking,’ Monsieur de Frilair was just saying to me, ‘to go rousing up and attacking the petty vanity of that *bourgeois aristocracy*? He showed them exactly what it was in their interests to do. The idiots wouldn’t have thought of it themselves, they were even tearing up. So now the interests of their caste were aroused, and they could blind themselves to the horror of sentencing a man to death. Clearly this Monsieur Sorel knows little of such affairs. If we aren’t able to save him by means of the king’s mercy, his death will be a kind of *suicide* . . .’”

Mathilde, of course, could not tell Julien what she did not yet suspect: that

Father de Frilair, seeing Julien as lost, thought it might serve his own ambitions if he were to become his successor.

Half mad with impotent rage and irritation, Julien said to Mathilde, "Go, attend the Mass they're saying for me, and let me have a moment's peace." Mathilde, extremely jealous already of Madame de Rênal's visits, had just heard about her departure, so she immediately understood the cause of Julien's bad temper; she burst into tears.

Her grief was real; Julien could see that and was all the more irritated. His need for solitude was so intense, but how could he obtain it?

At last Mathilde, having tried every argument she could think of to make him soften a little, turned to leave him, but at the same moment, Fouqué arrived.

"I need to be alone," he said to the faithful friend . . . And seeing him hesitate: "I'm composing a narrative for my appeal . . . anyway . . . do me a favor, will you, and don't speak to me about death, ever. If I need any special things done on the day, let me be the one to bring them up."

When Julien was left alone at last, he found himself weaker and more cowardly than before. The little strength remaining to that overwhelmed spirit of his had been expended in trying to conceal what he felt from Mademoiselle de La Mole and Fouqué.

Toward evening, one thought arose to console him:

If this morning, when death seemed so horrible to me, they had told me to get ready for execution, *the eye of the public would have been a spur to glory*;<sup>233</sup> perhaps my gait would be a little stiff, like that of some shy fop when he makes his entrance into a drawing room. A few sharp-eyed spectators, if there are any among these provincials, might have been able to detect my weakness . . . but no one would have *seen it*.

And he felt as if delivered from some part of his suffering. I'm cowardly right now at this moment, he repeated, chanting it like a tune, but no one will ever know.

Something almost worse yet awaited him the next day. His father had been

saying he was going to come visit; now, on this morning soon after Julien awoke, the white-haired old carpenter appeared in the cell.

Julien felt himself going weak, expecting the most awful reproaches. And to make the feeling even worse, on that morning he had been experiencing a sharp sense of guilt over failing to love his father.

Chance has put him and me side by side on this earth, he said to himself while the guard tidied up the cell a bit, and as it turns out we've done each other just about as much harm as we could. Now he comes, while my death is nearing, to give me the final blow.

Once they were alone in the cell, the old man began hurling the most severe reproaches at him.

Julien could not keep from crying. What disgraceful weakness! he said to himself in a rage. He'll go off and exaggerate my lack of bravery, and what a triumph that'll be for the Valenods and all the half-dead hypocrites who rule the roost in Verrières! They're so big here in France, with all the social advantages on their side. And up till now I could at least say to myself, "Yes, they get all the money, they get all the honors, but I'm the one with a noble heart."

Now they have a witness, one they'll all believe, and he'll go around Verrières certifying, and overstating, that I was weak in the face of death! I'll have been a coward in this time of trial, and that's something they'll all understand!

Julien was near despair. He didn't know how to get rid of his father. And to pretend in some way that would be convincing to such a sharp-eyed old man was entirely beyond his power.

His mind rapidly ran through all the possibilities. "*I've been able to save some money!*" he cried suddenly.

This was genius; the word completely changed both the old man's expression and Julien's position.

"How should I dispose of it?" Julien continued, calmer now; seeing the effect he had produced immediately rid him of all his feelings of inferiority.

The old carpenter burned with the desire not to let this money get away, part of which, evidently, Julien wished to leave to his brothers. He talked at length, and heatedly. Julien could now begin to mock him.

“Well, the good Lord has inspired me as to my will. I’ll give a thousand francs to each of my brothers, and the remainder to you.”

“That’s good,” said the old man. “The rest is my due. But since God has been good enough to touch your heart, and if you really want to die a good Christian, you need to pay your debts. There’s all the expense I went to in feeding and educating you, money I advanced you, and which you seem to have forgotten all about . . .”

Ah, there it is: a father’s love! Julien repeated to himself when he was alone again, sadness in his heart. Soon the jailer appeared.

“Monsieur, after a visit from parents, I always bring my guests a nice bottle of champagne. It’s a little expensive, six francs a bottle, but it does a man good.”

“Bring me three glasses,” he said with a boyish eagerness, “and ask those two prisoners I hear in the corridor to come in.”

The jailer brought in two ex-convicts who had reoffended and were waiting to be returned to the penal colony. These two were a pair of cheerful good-for-nothings who were actually rather remarkable for their skills, their courage, and their perfect coolheadedness.

“If you give me twenty francs,” one of them said to Julien, “I’ll tell you my life story in detail. It’s a top-shelf tale!”

“But how do I know you won’t lie to me?” asked Julien.

“Easy,” he replied. “My pal here wants the twenty francs, and he’ll turn me in if I make anything up.” His story was appalling. It featured a truly courageous heart, but one with only a single passion—money.

By the time they left, Julien was a changed man. All his anger with himself had dissipated. The horrible suffering, envenomed by cowardice, that had had him in its grip since the departure of Madame de Rênal, turned now into melancholy.

If I had been able to get to the point where I was less fooled by appearances, he said to himself, I would have seen that the drawing rooms of Paris were peopled with fine, upstanding men like my father, and with capable rogues like those two convicts. They’re right: the men of the drawing rooms never arise in the morning tortured by the anxious question, “how will I be able to eat today?”

But oh, how they boast of their integrity! And when called up for jury duty, how fiercely they'll condemn a man to death for stealing a silver knife and fork because he felt himself ready to faint from hunger!

But when it's at Court, and it's a matter of either losing or winning a ministerial portfolio, my honest drawing room gentlemen slip right into the same kind of crimes as those the convicts committed because hunger drove them to it . . .

There's no such thing as *natural justice*; that's just some antique nonsense, worthy of the prosecutor who was hunting me down the other day, and whose ancestor was enriched by some confiscation of Louis XIV.<sup>234</sup> There's no *law*, except when there's a statute that keeps you from doing something on pain of punishment. Before laws, the only *natural justice* was the lion's strength, or the need of the hungry creature, the freezing creature—*need* in short . . . No, the men who get honored are only crooks who've been lucky enough not to be caught red-handed. The accuser society launched at me was enriched by a crime . . . I committed attempted murder, and I've been justly condemned, but apart from that single act of mine, that Valenod who condemned me is a hundred times more harmful to society.

Well! Julien added with a sigh, but without anger, despite his avarice my father is a better man than they are. He never loved me. And now I make it as bad as it can be for him by dying a dishonorable death. That fear of running out of money, that exaggerated view of human evil that we call *avarice*—that's what's made him see enormous consolation and security in the sum of three or four hundred louis that I can leave him. Some Sunday after dinner he'll display all his gold to an envious Verrières. He'll look out at them and the look on his face will say, "At this price, which one of you wouldn't be thrilled to have your son die on the guillotine?"

This philosophy may have been sound enough, but it's the sort of thinking that makes a man start to wish for death. Five long days passed in this way. He was polite and gentle with Mathilde, for he could see that her intense jealousy had driven her to the point of exasperation. One night, Julien thought seriously

about taking his own life. His spirit was worn down by the profound suffering he had plunged into following the departure of Madame de Rênal. Nothing pleased him anymore, whether in the world of reality or that of imagination. Lack of exercise was starting to undermine his health, making him weak and excitable, like a young German student. He was losing that masculine, arrogant strength that can, with an energetic oath, push away the kind of unpleasant thoughts that assail the spirits of the miserable.

I've loved the truth . . . But where is it? . . . Hypocrisy everywhere, or if not that then charlatanism, and even among the most virtuous, even among the very greatest . . . Here his lips pursed in an expression of disgust . . . No, man cannot trust man.

Madame de \*\*\*, when she was collecting donations for poor orphans, told me that a certain prince had just given her ten louis; a lie. But what am I saying? Even Napoleon on Saint Helena! Pure charlatanism, a proclamation in favor of the king of Rome.<sup>235</sup>

Good God! If a man like that, and even when misfortune ought to have recalled him sternly to his duty, could lower himself to charlatanism, what hope is there for the rest of the species? . . .

Where is truth? In religion . . . Yes, he added, with the bitter smile of extreme contempt, in the mouths of the Maslons, the de Frilairs, the Castanèdes . . . Or maybe in real Christianity, where the priests are paid no more than the original apostles were? . . . But Saint Paul was paid, not in money but in the pleasure of commanding, of speaking, of ensuring that others spoke about him . . .

Ah, if there were a true religion . . . Oh, fool that I am! I see a Gothic cathedral with its venerable stained-glass windows, and my weak heart imagines a priest who's somehow the match of those windows . . . *He* would understand my soul, and my soul has such need of him . . . But instead all I find is some fop with unwashed hair . . . not much different from the Chevalier de Beauvois.

But a real priest, a Massillon, a Fénelon . . . Massillon consecrated Dubois. And Saint-Simon's *Memoirs* have ruined Fénelon for me.<sup>236</sup> But still, a real priest . . . Then suffering souls would have a meeting place in this world . . . We

wouldn't be so isolated . . . That good priest would talk to us about God. But which God? Not the Bible's God, that cruel, petty despot with a thirst for vengeance . . . but the God of Voltaire, just, good, infinite . . .

Now he was disturbed by memories from the Bible, which he knew by heart . . . But now, *where two or three are gathered together*,<sup>237</sup> how to believe in that great name God after all the frightful abuses our priests have visited upon it?

Living in isolation! . . . What torture! . . .

I'm losing my mind, and I'm not being fair, said Julien, striking his forehead. I'm completely alone here in this cell; but I didn't *live alone* while I was on earth; I had a powerful sense of *duty*. That duty was something I prescribed for myself, whether it was right or wrong . . . It was like the trunk of a strong, solid tree, something I could cling to when the storms came. I vacillated, I doubted—after all, I was only a man . . . But I was never swept away.

It must be the damp air in this cell that make me think about isolation . . .

But why go on being hypocritical while I'm cursing hypocrisy? It isn't death, or this cell, or the damp air—it's the absence of Madame de Rênal that's too much for me. If, at Verrières, in order to see her I would have to live in her cellar all alone for weeks at a time, would I complain?

It's the influence of the era I'm living in, he said aloud, followed by a bitter laugh. Talking all alone with myself, just a step away from death, I'm still a hypocrite . . . Oh, nineteenth century!

A hunter fires a shot in the forest, and his quarry tumbles down; he rushes forward to pick it up. His shoe strikes an anthill two feet tall, destroying the home of all the ants, scattering them and their eggs . . . But even the most philosophical ants can't begin to understand this enormous black body, so huge, so terrifying, that suddenly thrust itself through their home, and with such unbelievable suddenness, accompanied by a spray of red sparks . . .

So it is with death, with life, with eternity, things that must be perfectly simple for a creature with sense organs vast enough to be able to see them as they are . . .

A mayfly is born at nine in the morning during the long days of summer,



only to die at five o'clock in the evening. How can that creature understand the word *night*?

But give it five more hours of existence, and it'll see and understand what night is.

Then there's me. I'm going to die at twenty-three years of age. Give me five more years of life, and let me live them with Madame de Rênal . . .

He broke into a laugh, like Mephistopheles. How ridiculous to be thinking about all these conundrums!

One. I'm a hypocrite, as if there were someone here to listen to me.

Two. I'm forgetting to live and to love, when there's so little time left to live . . . Oh, Madame de Rênal is gone. Maybe her husband will let her come back to Besançon, to go on dishonoring herself.

There, that's what explains my isolation, not the absence of a just God, good, all-powerful, never evil, never bent on vengeance . . .

But oh, if he did exist . . . Sad but true, I'd fall right at his feet: "I deserve to die," I'd say to him, "but great God, good God, merciful God, let me have the one I love."

By now the night was well advanced. After an hour or two of peaceful sleep, Fouqué arrived.

Julien felt strong, resolute, like a man who sees clearly into his heart.

## 45

"I don't want to play a dirty trick on that poor Father Chas-Bernard by asking him to come here," Julien said to Fouqué. "The experience would spoil his dinner for a good three days. But see if you can find me a Jansenist, someone who's a friend of Father Pirard, someone who's not wrapped up in plots and intrigue."

Fouqué had been waiting impatiently for this chance. Julien acquitted him-

self with decency of everything that provincial opinion demands. Thanks to Monsieur de Frilair, and despite his unfortunate choice of confessor, Julien in his cell was under the protection of the Congrégation; if he had had a little more inclination toward action, he might have managed an escape. But the bad air in the cell had had its effect, and his mental powers were diminishing. So he was all the happier at the return of Madame de Rênal.

“My first duty is to you,” she said to him as they embraced. “I’ve run away from Verrières . . .”

Julien had no more petty egotism around her, and he told her all about his weak moments. She was good to him, and sweet.

That evening, as soon as she left the prison, she went to her aunt’s house, where she summoned the priest who had attached himself to Julien as to a piece of prey. Since he wanted nothing more badly than to be in good repute with the young women in Besançon’s higher levels of society, it was easy for Madame de Rênal to get him to depart for Bray-le-Haut to say a novena for Julien.

Words cannot express how wild, how intoxicated with love Julien was.

By dispensing gold generously, and by using and abusing the reputation of her aunt—who was a pious woman, well known and wealthy—Madame de Rênal obtained permission to visit Julien twice a day.

When Mathilde heard of that, her jealousy drove her practically to frenzy. Monsieur de Frilair had sworn to her that even with his position, he simply could not afford to fly in the face of all convention so far as to get her permission to go more than once per day. Mathilde had Madame de Rênal followed, to keep tabs on even her slightest movements. Monsieur de Frilair exhausted all the resources of his exceptionally calculating mind in trying to convince Mathilde that Julien was unworthy of her.

But even amid all these torments, she only loved Julien more, and nearly every day she came and made a horrible scene.

Julien wanted, at all costs, to behave decently toward this poor young woman he had so strangely compromised; but his intense, extreme love for Madame de Rênal overcame him time after time. When, after having given her plenty of false reasons why the visits of her rival were really quite innocent, he said to

himself, Well, we must be getting close to the last act of the drama now, and that's an excuse for my not being any better at dissimulating.

Mademoiselle de La Mole learned of the death of the Marquis de Croisenois. Monsieur de Thaler, that fabulously wealthy man, had allowed himself to make some unpleasant remarks about Mathilde's disappearance; Monsieur de Croisenois entreated with him to take them back. Monsieur de Thaler showed him some anonymous letters he had received, so full of details and composed with such skill that the marquis could not fail to see the truth.

Monsieur de Thaler made some jests entirely devoid of subtlety. Half mad with rage and pain, Monsieur de Croisenois demanded such extreme reparations that the millionaire preferred a duel. Stupidity triumphed, and one of the Parisian men most worthy of being loved met his death at the age of twenty-four.

That death had a strange, baleful effect on Julien's weakening spirit.

"That poor Croisenois," he said to Mathilde, "was really very reasonable, and he was very decent to both of us. He ought to have hated me after some of those imprudent things you said in your mother's drawing room, and he could have challenged me to a duel, because when disdain turns to hatred, it's usually furious . . ."

The death of Monsieur de Croisenois altered all of Julien's thinking about the future of Mathilde; over several days, he tried to convince her that she ought to accept the hand of Monsieur de Luz. "He's a timid man, not too much of a Jesuit," he said to her, "but someone who wants to climb the ladder. With an ambition that's more restrained but also more consistent than that of poor Croisenois, and without any dukes or duchesses in his family, he won't see any problems in marrying the widow of Julien Sorel."

"And a widow who in fact despises grand passions," Mathilde replied icily, "because she's lived long enough to see her lover, after six months, prefer another woman to her—another woman who's the cause of all this misery."

"You're not being fair. The visits by Madame de Rênal will help my lawyer in Paris by suggesting some powerful possibilities for my appeal; he'll paint a picture of the murderer being honored with the care and attention of the victim.

That could have an effect, and who knows, maybe someday you'll see me depicted as a character in some melodrama," etc., etc.

A frenzied jealousy that could not find vengeance, an ongoing state of hopeless suffering (hopeless because, even if Julien could be saved, how would she ever regain his love?), the shame and the pain of loving the unfaithful man more than ever—all this had plunged Mademoiselle de La Mole into an unhappy silence, one from which neither the busied attentions of Monsieur de Frilair nor the straight-talking frankness of Fouqué could extricate her.

But Julien, apart from those moments usurped by the presence of Mathilde, was living a life in and for love, with almost no thought of the future. One strange effect of that passion—now that it was in extreme form and devoid of all pretense—was that Madame de Rênal almost shared his carefree outlook and his sweet cheerfulness.

"In the past," Julien said to her, "when I could have been so happy during those walks we used to take in the Vergy forests, my overheated ambition pulled me out of the moment and into imaginary places. Instead of pressing this charming arm, so near to my lips, tighter up against my heart, the future kept stealing me away from you. I was fighting an innumerable host of combats, battles I would need to win if I were to amass my colossal fortune . . . No, I would have died without knowing what happiness was if you hadn't come to see me in this prison."

Two events arose to trouble this tranquil life. Julien's confessor, even though he was a Jansenist, was not free of the inclination toward intrigue more typical of the Jesuits, and he unknowingly became their instrument.

He arrived one day, telling Julien that if he weren't to slip into the hideous sin of suicide, he must take every possible step to win his appeal. Now, considering that the clergy had such tremendous influence over the minister of justice in Paris, an easy method presented itself: Julien should experience a very public conversion . . .

"Public!" repeated Julien. "Ah, now I've caught you, Father, engaging in playacting just like some kind of missionary . . ."

"Your youth," the Jansenist replied gravely, "the handsome appearance

Providence has elected to bestow upon you, and even the motive for your crime, which remains inexplicable, the heroic measures Mademoiselle de La Mole continues so generously to expend on helping you: in short, everything, up to and including the stunning friendship your victim shows you, it's all come together to make you a hero to all the young women in Besançon. They've forgotten everything else, even politics . . .

"Your conversion would echo within their hearts, and leave a profound, lasting impression there. You could be of significant use to our religion, and do you expect me to hesitate just because the Jesuits would try to do the same thing in these circumstances? If so, then they continue to do harm, even though this case has managed to escape their rapacious clutches: oh, do not let that be! The tears that would flow over your conversion would wash away all the corrosive effects of ten volumes of that impious Voltaire's works!"

"And what would I be left with," Julien replied coldly, "if I end up despising myself? I've been ambitious, and I have no desire to blame myself. At the time, I acted according to the way things were done then. Now, I only live from day to day. But as far as I can see, I'd feel utterly miserable if I gave in to a cowardly scheme like this . . ."

The other incident, and one that had a deeper impact on Julien, was something Madame de Rênal brought about. Some scheming lady friend of hers, I don't know which, succeeded in persuading that simple, so-timid soul that it was her duty to go off to Saint-Cloud, and to go down on her knees before King Charles X.<sup>238</sup>

She was making the sacrifice of parting from Julien, and after the effort required by that, the unpleasantness of making a public spectacle of herself, which in other times would have seemed a fate worse than death, now counted for nothing in her eyes.

"I'll go to the king, and I'll admit openly that you are my love. The life of a man, and the life of a man like Julien, must supersede every other consideration. I'll say that your attempt on my life was motivated by jealousy. There are many examples of poor souls saved in cases like this, out of the jury's human feelings, or those of the king . . ."

“I’ll never see you again. I’ll have my cell door closed to you,” cried Julien, “and then you can rest assured that on the day after that I’ll put an end to my life, out of pure despair, unless you swear to me that you won’t take any step that will make a public spectacle of us. That idea of going to Paris couldn’t have come from you. Tell me the name of the brilliant schemer who came up with it . . .

“Let’s be happy for the small number of days left in this short life. Let’s live hidden away; my crime is already too public. Mademoiselle de La Mole has all the connections possible in Paris, and you can be sure she’s been doing everything that’s humanly possible. Out here in the provinces, I have all the wealthy and high-status people against me. Your plan would only further antagonize those wealthy and oh-so-moderate men, for whom life is such an easy thing . . . Let’s not give the Maslons and the Valenods anything more to laugh at, not to mention the thousands of better people.”

The bad air in his cell was becoming intolerable to Julien. So it was fortunate for him that, on the day they announced he was to be executed, there was good, bright sunshine rejuvenating the countryside, and Julien felt all the bravery he needed. Walking out in the fresh air was as delicious a sensation for him as a walk along the coastline is for a sailor who’s been long at sea. Let’s go, all is well, he said to himself, and I’m not lacking courage at all.

That head of his had never looked as poetic as the moment it was about to fall. The sweetest moments he had enjoyed once in the forests around Vergy came vigorously thronging back into his memory now.

Everything took place simply, the way it was supposed to, and without any affectation on his part.

Two days before, he had said to Fouqué, “As far as emotion is concerned, I can’t answer for it. This ugly, dank cell has caused me some feverish moments when I couldn’t even recognize myself; but as for fear, no, no one will see me turning pale.”

He made advance arrangements so that on the morning of the last day, Fouqué would pick up both Mathilde and Madame de Rênal. “Take them out together in the same carriage,” he said. “And arrange it so that the post horses

stay at a gallop. They'll either fall into each other's arms, or they'll sit there in mortal hatred. Either way, the poor women will have a little distraction from their sorrow."

Julien had insisted that Madame de Rênal swear she would care for Mathilde's child.

"Who knows? Maybe we continue to have some sensation after death," he said to Fouqué one day. "I'd like to repose—since 'repose' is the word for it—up in that little cave, on the big mountain overlooking Verrières. I've told you about it several times. Hidden away in my grotto up there, my gaze swooping out over one of the richest provinces in France, ambition burning in my heart—oh, that was my passion then . . . But that cave is still dear to me, and nobody could deny that it's the kind of place to make the soul of a philosopher seethe with envy . . . Well! These fine people of the Congrégation in Besançon figure out ways to make money out of anything, so if you approach them the right way, they'll surely sell you my mortal remains . . ."

And Fouqué succeeded in that sad negotiation. He was spending the night alone in his room, beside the corpse of his friend, when to his surprise Mathilde entered. Just a few hours before, he had left her some ten leagues from Besançon. There was a wild look about her, and in her eyes.

"I want to see," she said to him.

Fouqué didn't have the courage to speak or even get up. He pointed toward the blue greatcoat on the floor; it covered what remained of Julien.

She went down on her knees. The memory of Boniface de La Mole and of Marguerite of Navarre no doubt came to her to give her a superhuman courage. Her trembling hands opened up the coat. Fouqué turned his eyes away.

He heard Mathilde moving briskly around the room. She lit several candles. When Fouqué summoned up the strength to look at her, she had placed, on a small marble table in front of her, the head of Julien, and she was kissing his brow . . .

Mathilde followed her beloved up to the tomb he had chosen. A great many priests escorted the coffin; unknown to any of them, she sat alone in her draped carriage, balancing on her knees the head of the man she had loved so much.

When they arrived near the summit of one of the tallest Jura mountains, in the middle of the night, in that little cave magnificently illuminated with an infinite number of candles, twenty priests celebrated the Mass of the Dead. All the inhabitants of the little mountain villages, through which the convoy had passed, came too, attracted by the uniqueness of this strange ceremony.

Mathilde appeared in the midst of them, dressed in a long mourning gown, and, at the end of the service, she scattered several thousand five-franc pieces into the crowd.

Remaining alone with Fouqué, she wanted to bury the head of her beloved with her own hands. Fouqué nearly went mad with grief.

Mathilde saw to it that the wild grotto was adorned with marble sculptures from Italy, at great expense.

Madame de Rênal was faithful to her oath. She did not seek in any way to end her life, but three days after Julien, she died while embracing her children.

#### TO THE HAPPY FEW

*The inconvenient thing about the reign of public opinion, though it does give rise to liberty, is that it meddles in areas where it has no business; for example: private life. This accounts for the gloom of life in America and England. To avoid meddling with private life, the author has invented a small town, Verrières, and when he had need of a bishop, a jury, a courtroom, he placed them all in Besançon, a place he has never visited.*